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article

Mega-events and regional identities: the 2010 Asian Games language controversy

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This article argues that mega-events can become important sites for the contestation of a variety of justice claims, including recognition for regional identities. The existing literature explores the potential of mega-events to achieve redistribution but their impact on identity claims is under-researched. Our analysis of the Cantonese language controversy in the run-up to the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games fills this gap by employing a discourse-historical approach. It demonstrates that a range of discursive strategies relating to the Cantonese language played a crucial role in the articulation of a Cantonese regional identity and were, in turn, countered through discursive strategies employed by local government, which argued that Cantonese and Chinese identities are not mutually exclusive. We conclude that scholars need to pay more attention to mega-events that are staged in non-Western countries outside core cities, as well as to the role that they can play in attempts to promote the recognition of regional identities.

Introduction

In a context of globalisation and neoliberal state restructuring, mega-events have come to play a key role in the entrepreneurial strategies of cities aiming to attract footloose capital and tourists (Hall and Hubbard, 1998; Jessop and Sum, 2000; Hall, 2006; Müller and Gaffney, 2018). As a result of their considerable impact, in the process, these mega-events have become crucibles of contention in many cities. It is not therefore surprising that the academic literature has also started to pay attention to these events. Building on the work of Fraser, Young and others, we argue that justice claims regarding mega-events are diverse, and include claims for economic justice (redistribution), cultural justice (recognition) and political justice (participation). Following Fraser (1995), we stress that the distinction between these justice claims is analytical; in practice, they are intertwined. Nonetheless, these justice claims are also irreducible, and they each deserve attention. However, despite some exceptions (see, for instance, Lenskyj, 2000, 2002, 2008), the literature on mega-events generally has a bias towards issues of economic injustice. Additional research adding attention to other sources of injustice is therefore needed.

China provides a good location for such research. Here, like elsewhere, mega-events have become an inherent part of strategies for urban restructuring. Recent events include, for instance, the Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics, the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games, the Shanghai 2010 World Expo and the Shenzhen 2011 Universiade. These events have contributed to a dramatic transformation of their host cities and, not surprisingly, thereby also instigated considerable conflicts (Burbank et al, 2001; Shin, 2012, 2014; Smith, 2012; Watt, 2013). However, the analysis of these conflicts is somewhat one-sided. On the one hand, while there are exceptions, especially in the more recent literature (for example, Lin et al, 2018), there is a strong focus on events in China's largest cities – the Beijing Olympics and the Shanghai Expo (for example, Broudehoux, 2004, 2007; Ren, 2008; Shin, 2012; Shin and Li, 2012; Ren and Weinstein, 2013; Chan and Li, 2017). Meanwhile, on the other hand, publications on mega-events outside of these prime cities are less frequent. On top of this, the attention in the literature on mega-events in China is relatively one-sided. For instance, the Chinese-language literature mainly focuses on two issues: on the one hand, this literature criticises event-induced dispossessions and economic inequalities; on the other, it discusses urban spatial and economic developments triggered by the mega-events under state–market growth coalitions (for example, Zhang et al, 2007; Chen et al, 2010; Zhou, 2010; Bao and Li, 2012). At the same time, there is little attention on issues of cultural and political injustice. As we will show, for an analysis of cultural and political injustices related to mega-events, it can be especially interesting to research mega-events outside of the prime cities, where issues of regional identity are more pronounced.

In this article, we aim to help fill these two research gaps with a discussion of the Cantonese language controversy that took place in the run-up to the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games. In the run-up to these games, various controversies erupted, including economic conflicts over the appropriation of space and related evictions that have attracted much attention in the writing about mega-events in other Chinese cities – and about Chinese urban development in general (Shin, 2013; Gransow, 2014). However, the character of the Cantonese language controversy that erupted in Guangzhou was distinctly different. Triggered by a proposal of the Guangzhou

committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) to change the main broadcasting language for these Asian Games from Cantonese to *Putonghua*, claims for cultural justice relating to the recognition of regional identity take centre stage in this controversy. In this article, we will address the dynamics behind this claim-making and its relationship to other types of controversies through the following research questions: 'How did the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games become a crucible for the articulation of a regional Cantonese identity?'; and 'What does this imply for the mega-event literature?'

Following this introduction, we answer these research questions in six sections. On the basis of the work of Fraser and others, the second section first develops a theoretical framework that can accommodate addressing diverse social justice claims regarding mega-events. The third section then introduces the Cantonese language controversy. The fourth section presents critical discourse analysis, in particular, the discourse-historical approach, which we will employ to examine social justice claims during the Cantonese language controversy. In line with this approach, the fifth section places this controversy in its historical context and the sixth section categorises and analyses the justice claims during this controversy through selected texts from multiple data sources. In the seventh and final section, we answer our research questions and draw conclusions.

Mega-events, urban contention and social justice claims

Mega-events are also referred to as 'hallmark' or 'special' events (see, for example, Law, 1994; Waitt, 1999; Roche, 2000). According to Horne (2007), they have two central features: they have significant consequences for the host city, region or nation; and they attract considerable media coverage. Müller (2015: 8) touches on similar aspects when he describes mega-events as 'ambulatory occasions of a fixed duration that (a) attract a large number of visitors, (b) have a large mediated reach, (c) come with large costs, and (d) have large impacts on the built environment and the population'. These references illustrate the view that urban transformative capacity is one of the defining aspects of a mega-event. This capacity translates not only into material interventions such as the construction of new sports venues and infrastructures, but also into the reconfiguration of social relations and governance patterns. In view of the breath of these consequences, it is not surprising that entrepreneurial strategies to host mega-events often provoke considerable urban conflicts between organisers and their backers, on the one hand, and 'the public', on the other. Giulianotti et al (2015), for instance, identify six forms of public conflict, criticism and complaint that emerged in response to the London 2012 Olympic Games: national criticisms (for instance, on resource distribution); local criticism (for instance, on the lack of job benefits); issue-specific campaigns (for instance, regarding the environment); 'glocal' protests against specific nations or sponsors; neo-tribal spectacles like mass cycle rides; and anti-Olympic forums and demonstrations. Here, we especially wonder about the nature of the social claims that are expressed during such conflicts.

In the 20th century, for a long time, social conflicts were especially interpreted as class conflicts. From this economic perspective, justice claims were interpreted as claims for an equal distribution. Classical Marxism, for instance, stressed the crucial role of the economic base in determining the superstructure of social life. From this perspective, injustices that might appear to be social phenomena in the end turned

out to be produced by the characteristics of the economic base, and injustice was thus eventually a class issue. However, in the late 20th century, an increasing number of authors started to criticise the economic determinism of such a perspective, stressing that the economy does not determine everything (for example, Hall, 1986; Graham, 2002). The implication is that claims for redistribution cannot form a sufficient response to all social injustices (Wissink, 2015). Fraser has been especially vocal in theorising this argument. She observes increased attention for a 'post-socialist' struggle for recognition, in which groups have mobilised under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, race, gender and sexuality. In the process, 'group identity supplant[ed] class interest as the chief medium of political mobilization. And cultural recognition displace[d] socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle' (Fraser, 1995: 68). More recently, Fraser (2009) started to discern representation as the solution for a third type of 'political' injustice.

Fraser's distinction between redistribution, recognition and representation helps to operationalise earlier claims by Young (1990) that there is a need to displace the distributive paradigm. In her view, there are various faces of oppression that cannot be reduced to distribution alone as they, in part, relate to a lack of recognition of group difference. Such cultural injustices are rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication. Examples include cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect. Young (1990: 3) argues 'that where social group differences exist and some groups are privileged while others are oppressed, social justice requires explicitly acknowledging and attending to those group differences in order to undermine oppression'. In the wake of this literature, it has become common practice to distinguish between different forms of social injustice. Purcell (2008), for instance, distinguishes between neoliberalisation and other forms of oppression. Marcuse (2012) differentiates between the deprived (injustice of class) and the discontented (injustice of difference). Gransow (2014) develops a multidimensional analysis of recognition when studying China's urban regeneration, which includes political, cultural and social recognition next to economic recognition.

It is important to recognise that, historically, these multidimensional frameworks of social justice are an exception. Instead, theories have usually foregrounded one of these sources of injustice without much attention for the others. It is one of the strengths of Fraser's work that she explicitly foregrounds the relations between different forms of social justice, arguing that 'justice today requires *both* redistribution *and* recognition' (to which she has later added representation). From the start, Fraser (1995: 69, emphasis in original) is clear that the 'distinction between economic injustice and cultural injustice is analytical. In practice, the two are intertwined'. For instance, injustices of race and class often go hand in hand as a result of varied sources like education or job selection, and research should foreground such 'fatal couplings of power and difference' (Gilmore, 2002). As Fraser (1995: 71) argues: '[c]ultural norms that are unfairly biased against some are institutionalized in the state and the economy; meanwhile, economic disadvantage impedes equal participation in the making of culture, in public spheres and in everyday life. The result is often a vicious circle of cultural and economic subordination.' In these situations, struggles against sources of oppression will point in the same direction. However, this is not always the case, and as each of the forms of injustice are pervasive in contemporary societies, they should also each be remedied (Fraser, 1995: 72).

Fraser (1995) has extensively discussed the potential to remedy different forms of injustice. Assuming that justice requires redistribution, recognition and representation, she has paid considerable attention to the relationships between these remedies: 'In part, this means figuring out how to conceptualize cultural recognition and social equality in forms that support rather than undermine one another.… It also means theorizing the ways in which economic disadvantage and cultural disrespect are currently entwined with and support one another' (Fraser, 1995: 69). Eventually, Fraser argues that this is best served by responses that combine socialist economics with deconstructive cultural politics. These solutions marry a deep restructuring of relations of production with a deep restructuring of relations of recognition, and will thus help to blur group differentiation. At the same time, she is highly critical of an identity politics that is based on explicit group differentiation as a basis for political action as such an oppositional strategy can block adequate responses to other injustices. This critical interpretation of group differentiation as the basis for action is reflected in work on social movements by other authors like Shin (2013) and Purcell (2008). Arguing that social movements should focus on multiple forms of injustice, they also stress that this needs to result in cross-group coalitions that are open to the injustices of multiple groups.

These observations are highly relevant for the literature on conflicts over mega-events. At the core of these conflicts are social justice claims and, with reference to the aforementioned literature, we have to be aware that these can be diverse. With Fraser in mind, we suggest that each of the sources of injustice have to be acknowledged, and that responses have to make a solution to each of them possible. However, so far, the mega-event literature remains a far cry from that ideal. After all, while critical of the negative effects of mega-events, the existing literature prioritises redistributive injustice over other forms of injustice. This literature links these events to urban growth coalitions promoting economic growth and new capital accumulation (Hiller, 2000; Burbank et al, 2001; Shin and Li, 2012). It highlights the detrimental effects of demolitions, forced evictions and mass displacement that result from inner-city redevelopment and gentrification (Horne, 2007; Gaffney, 2010). Strikingly, cultural injustices receive much less attention. There is some work focusing on cultural impacts (for instance, Lenskyj, 2000, 2002, 2008) but this usually focuses on a singular cultural dimension. Additional research adding attention to other sources of injustice is therefore urgently needed. The Cantonese language controversy that took place in the run-up to the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games provides an excellent opportunity for this. On the one hand, at the core of this controversy are claims for cultural justice as it focuses on the recognition of the Cantonese cultural identity. On the other hand, as we will see, analysing this controversy can help to reflect on the intersections of different forms of injustice and on suitable responses that accommodate solutions to each of these.

The Cantonese language controversy and the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games

The Cantonese language controversy took place in the run-up to the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games. For the Guangzhou municipal government, the Asian Games were a crucial element in its strategy to construct Guangzhou as a national central city. It wanted to further strengthen this strategy by transforming Guangzhou Television Station into a satellite station – after all, satellite television could help to enhance the

national influence of the city. However, it is a prerequisite for becoming a satellite television station to broadcast in *Putonghua* instead of Cantonese. Five months before the opening of the Asian Games, in June 2010, the Guangzhou committee of the CPPCC[1] issued a questionnaire regarding the possibility of changing the main broadcasting language of the Guangzhou Television Station from Cantonese to Mandarin (or *Putonghua*). According to the CPPCC, the rationale for this proposal was 'to promote unity, forge a good language environment and cater to non–Cantonese speakers welcoming the Asian Games' (*Yangcheng Evening News*, 6 July 2010). However, the survey eventually showed that more than 80 per cent of the respondents – 30,000 in total – preferred to retain broadcasts in Cantonese; only 20 per cent favoured Mandarin.

Despite such overwhelming opposition, the Guangzhou CPPCC sent a proposal entitled 'Further strengthen the construction of the Asian Games' soft environment' to the mayor of Guangzhou, suggesting that the Guangzhou Television Station switch its broadcasting language from Cantonese to Mandarin. Referring to the opposition, the author of this proposal, deputy director of the CPPCC JI Keguang, asserted that '[w]e need to educate and guide the audience, and let them better understand the significance of popularising *Putonghua* and its significance to the Games' (*News Express*, 6 July 2010). Unsurprisingly, this statement provoked intense online and offline resistance from Cantonese groups. The proposal was seen not only as a cleansing of the Cantonese language, but also as an attack on the Cantonese cultural identity. In response, on 26 July, a large-scale street demonstration took place around Jiang'nanxi metro station in Guangzhou, when thousands of protesters participated in a rally to 'protect the Cantonese culture'. A week later, on 1 August, another demonstration took place in the People's Park, one of Guangzhou's largest public parks. This time, the police claimed that protesters were holding an illegal assembly and detained at least 20 people, among them several Hong Kong journalists. In response, the Guangzhou media were either silent or published short equivocal reports on the incident. After this, the movement quickly turned into a unifying force for pro-Cantonese groups, and protests soon spread to Hong Kong. Here, about two hundred protesters attended a rally at Wan Chai's Southorn playground and marched to the government headquarters in Central. This rare joint campaign demarcated the first time that Cantonese groups in Hong Kong and Guangdong mobilised together to reclaim their Cantonese identity.

In response, in late July 2010, the Guangzhou municipal government published a statement denying that it had ever tried to abolish the Cantonese language. The proposed change to *Putonghua* was merely a 'thorough pseudo-proposition' (*weimingti*). Eventually, the government calmed people down by using bilingual (Mandarin and Cantonese) broadcasting. The pro-Cantonese movement thus achieved modest success ahead of the Asian Games.

Methodology

In order to analyse the social justice claims in the Cantonese language controversy, we draw upon the discourse-historical approach (DHA). As a school of critical discourse analysis, DHA views language and other semiotic systems as a form of social practice. It focuses on the discursive dimensions of the enactment of power and domination by social institutions and elites (Van Dijk, 1993). One salient feature of DHA is its emphasis on the historical context of discourse. As Wodak (2009: 38) suggests, DHA

attempts to 'integrate and triangulate knowledge about the historical sources and the background of the social and political fields within which discursive events are embedded'. Thus, this approach can help to contextualise the Cantonese language controversy during the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games in its historical setting. In this way, the Asian Games can be interpreted as crucible of ongoing urban contention against a historical socio-political background. In this study, we first present the historical context within which the Cantonese language controversy emerged, and then adopt DHA's three-dimensional framework to analyse our 'corpus': the contents/topics that were discussed in speech and writing; the discursive strategies employed; and the linguistic means that were drawn upon to realise both topics and strategies.

Our corpus was compiled from both newspapers and online commentaries. First, we searched six local state-owned newspapers that cover most of the relevant information about the government's report in Guangzhou through the Wisenews database: *Yangcheng Evening News*, *Nanfang Daily*, *Guangzhou Daily*, *News Express*, *Nanfang Metropolis* and *Information Times*. This search resulted in 85 reports between June and December 2010 that were directly relevant to the controversy. Second, we examined social media, such as microblogs and online forums. Pro-Cantonese discourses prevailed on these online platforms during the controversy as the protesters were mainly Cantonese youth – between 20 and 30 years of age – who primarily used social media to voice their opinions. During the two large-scale protests, microblogs were the main tools for the dissemination of assembly information. Thus, the online data constitute a relatively reliable sample for examining social claims. We specifically collected posts from two influential microblogs whose bloggers were leaders in this controversy. One of these is Mr Han, a local delegate of the Guangzhou CPPCC. He posted a message on 5 July 2010 and soon received 3,298 comments. The other microblogger is Mr Chen, a famous TV host. He posted a message on 7 June 2010 and received 680 responses. In addition to this corpus, we also conducted interviews. However, as a result of the political sensitivity of this controversy, most protesters refused to talk to us. In the end, we only conducted seven interviews via email.

The historical context of the Cantonese language controversy

The Cantonese language is also known as *Guangzhouhua*, *yueyu* or *baihua*. It is commonly used in Guangdong, the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, Hong Kong and Macau, as well as by overseas Chinese who migrated from these areas. Cantonese is officially classified as a Chinese dialect, with a status that is inferior to the official Mandarin – or *Putonghua* – language (Liu, 2010). Historically, two national policies have especially contributed to the marginalisation of the Cantonese language in Guangzhou: on the one hand, national policy established *Putonghua* as the nation's official language[2]; on the other, China's economic reforms instigated the large-scale migration of non-Cantonese speakers to Guangzhou.

China's search for a national standard language began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which was an era of social and political transition from an 'old', 'backward' feudal China to a new and 'modern' state. After the formation of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the state launched a nationwide language standardisation campaign as a crucial component of state building and political control (Liu, 2010). The standardisation of *Putonghua* was thus a deliberate institutional effort closely related to party-state making (Dong, 2010). In this sense, *Putonghua* served as an instrument of political control of

the country's periphery and of the construction of a homogeneous Chinese identity (Guo, 2004). Eventually, the 1982 Constitution enshrined *Putonghua* as the only official language. In 1994, the National Working Committee of Chinese Languages launched the 'National Proficiency Test of Putonghua' as a necessary proficiency certification for entrance into crucial professions in the educational system and the labour market (Dong, 2010). *Putonghua* was also further legitimised as the only language allowed in primary and secondary public schools. In 2000, China's central government passed the Law of the National Common Language for the People's Republic of China, which stipulates the hegemonic use of *Putonghua* in both formal and public spheres (Dong, 2010). This law resulted in a ban on the use of dialects at many radio and television stations. However, television stations in Guangdong were allowed to continue broadcasting in Cantonese because of the province's proximity to Hong Kong.

Next to national language legislation, China's economic-driven migration was a second factor in changing the linguistic landscape in Guangzhou. Due to its long agricultural history and relatively remote geographic location, Guangzhou's strong local identity has counteracted the central state's attempts to exert political influence (Qian et al, 2012). However, economic reform policies since the late 1970s greatly facilitated the proliferation of *Putonghua* in Guangdong. Millions of migrant workers from Hunan, Jiangxi and Sichuan provinces, who spoke different dialects, came to Guangdong to find better life opportunities. Obviously, they also carried their cultural and linguistic heritage with them. This mass migration from inland to coastal regions, and the resulting unprecedented speed of urbanisation, has contributed to China's economic miracle. However, it also created cultural diversity, social tensions and conflicts. These especially played out in the further spread of existing discriminatory discourse from Cantonese speakers, forming a local versus non-local divide between Cantonese-speaking groups and the migrant population.

Together, the government's language policies and the influx of migrant workers to Guangzhou dramatically changed the setting for the Cantonese-speaking population. In political, economic and social life, Mandarin became the predominant language. Meanwhile, Cantonese, the native language spoken among local groups, gradually withdrew into the private sphere. Obviously, this transformation did not go unchallenged. The legislation of *Putonghua* as the compulsory language in schools, for instance, resulted in intensive resistance from Cantonese groups. Therefore, the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games were not the root cause of the Cantonese language controversy; however, they did come to catalyse this struggle. They were part of a conscious strategy to construct a 'favourable' city image and to legitimise large-scale urban reconstruction projects. They were also promoted as a vehicle to reinforce a common national Chinese identity and to solidify nascent nation-building processes. In response, the Asian Games thus became an 'adversarial site' (Cornelissen, 2012) where highly contradictory representations of Guangzhou's future were expressed, which, in turn, generated intense conflicts (Gotham, 2005; Gold and Gold, 2008) – they became a crucible for social contestations among diverse social groups about the Cantonese language.

Categories in the Cantonese language controversy

The analysis of the discourse in our corpus suggests that the opposition to *Putonghua* during the Cantonese language controversy was expressed through multiple images, texts and symbols. However, behind this multitude of expressions, three main themes implicitly

structure the discourse of opposition: the contrast between language and dialect; the contrast between modern and traditional; and the contrast between locals and others.

Language versus dialect

Cantonese speakers constitute the third largest population in China. It is therefore not surprising that the question of whether Cantonese is a language rather than a regional dialect is a topic of constant online discussions. This was reiterated during the Cantonese language controversy, when a large number of online commentaries argued that Cantonese was a distinct language parallel to *Putonghua*. This argument was justified using the topos of history. Proponents claimed that Cantonese is a modern variant of the ancient Han language, and that it is a much older language than *Putonghua*. The pronunciation and vocabulary of Cantonese are similar to the official language of the Tang dynasty. It is tonally more complex than *Putonghua* and has some unique characters. Furthermore, *Putonghua* is based on the Beijing dialect, which has less history than Cantonese:

> As a Cantonese speaker, I would be really disappointed if it was to become marginalised on the mainland by the promotion of Putonghua to encourage communication between Chinese citizens. This would *destroy one aspect of the traditional culture of China*, as Cantonese is regarded as a modern variant of the ancient Han language. It is, in fact, a *much older language than Putonghua*. (Excerpt of an online commentary, emphasis added)

The heated debates not only targeted the protection of the Cantonese language, but also discussed the preservation of Cantonese culture – or *Lingnam* culture – more broadly. As one of China's major traditional cultures, *Lingnan* culture is found in Southern China. It is quite distinct in its spoken and written language, traditions and architecture from the various cultures of Northern China. *Lingnan* culture has been present in Southern China since the Ming dynasty in the late 14th century. As the language controversy ramped up, some socially conscious activists reasserted this regional identity. They stressed that Cantonese language protection coincided with the preservation of local culture, claiming that Cantonese is an integral part of *Lingnan* culture. A public intellectual and a delegate to the city's CPPCC, Mr Han, pushed this message on his microblog, commenting that there is an '[e]mergency of our mother tongue (Cantonese)! Lingnan culture is on its way to extinction!'

Within a few hours, Mr Han's microblog received thousands of comments, and it was forwarded thousands of times. Some followers concurred that the Cantonese language is directly related to local culture:

> Cantonese language is closely related to our local lifestyle. If Cantonese is in a downfall, the culture, the lifestyle will change accordingly. I am afraid that Guangzhou people will have collective amnesia. Why are we not adding one more Putonghua channel, rather than cutting off the Cantonese? (Comment on Mr Han's microblog, 5 July 2010)

Table 1: Slogans used in the language controversy

Notes
Cantonese, anchors ahoy! *Putonghua*, pack it up
Putonghua, stop it and get away
Guangzhou will not be Guangzhou anymore if the local TV doesn't broadcast in Cantonese
Alive, I am a Guangzhou man; dead, I am a Guangzhou ghost. Till death I will never speak *Putonghua*
Cantonese lives, so Guangzhou lives
Cantonese is the soul of Guangzhou people! It is impossible for me to speak *Putonghua* at all
Native language is in danger, *Lingnan* culture is in danger

An editorial from *Southern Metropolis* also commented:

> Cantonese language is not only the cultural thing, but also *the lifestyle of local citizens* itself. It has the right to occupy a corresponding proportion on the popular media. If Cantonese is excluded from the main media, essentially, this is an *exclusion of the shared, collectively owned identity of locals*. If [the Guangzhou government] respects Guangzhou, respects the Canton lifestyle, it should not repress the Cantonese language. (*Southern Metropolis*, 7 July 2010)

These excerpts illustrate that from the perspective of the Cantonese community, the decline of the Cantonese language meant that their distinct identity was under threat. In this framing, the Cantonese language thus becomes a powerful symbol representing all contents of regional identity (Qian et al, 2012: 910). Local media played an important role in spreading this message, and thus triggering a bigger wave of citywide debates. *Yangcheng Evening News*, for instance, published a feature story about a primary school in Guangzhou offering a '*Putonghua*-only' study environment for students. According to the newspaper, this contributed to a language gap between older generations who can only speak Cantonese and younger generations who can only speak Mandarin. In the process, all sorts of slogans filled the media and online forums: there was need for 'Cantonese conservation'; people observed a 'Cantonese fall' (*yueyulunxian*); and it was argued that 'Guangzhou people face a collective amnesia'. An overview of some of the slogans circulating in cyberspace during this controversy is presented in Table 1.

Various slogans of local protesters served as rallying cries for reclaiming a language-based cultural identity (see Table 1). They constituted a discursive regime among Cantonese groups, which employs one single, stable place symbol – the Cantonese language – to essentialise a place-based cultural identity. These slogans were widely used in the July and August 2010 demonstrations and then circulated widely online as discursive weapons in articulating a strong sense of local belonging. The Cantonese language protest was thus framed as a place-based identity politics through which participants struggled to maintain their regional culture. On a linguistic level, during the controversy, *puns* and *parodies* were extensively used. One example of a pun is the nickname 'cook winter melon' for Mandarin.[3] Many examples of parody can be found on posters on websites. For instance, one parodies Chinese officials' propaganda style: 'Speaking Cantonese is a basic right and a duty

for every Guangzhou citizen.' This mimics the language style of the government when promoting official policies.

One discursive strategy used by protesters in this process is called the *referential strategy* or *nomination strategy* (Wodak, 2009). For Cantonese groups, the proposal of 'Promoting Putonghua and eliminating Cantonese' (*tuipu feiyue*) was 'language slaughter' (*tuipuji*). As they saw it, by eliminating Cantonese, the Guangzhou government meant to discriminate against Cantonese culture and Cantonese identity, eventually leaving behind only a universal Chinese identity.

Modern versus historical

The second theme expressed during this controversy represents a counter-discourse to the promotion of a new, modern city image for Guangzhou. During the six years of preparation for the Asian Games, in pursuit of a totalising modernity and of economic development, the `Guangzhou government initiated citywide urban renewal projects that required the demolition of a large number of historic buildings and cityscapes (Lin, 2013). This triggered a collective nostalgia for an authentic Guangzhou image. The responses to this re-imagination of urban space are closely linked to the reassertion of a Cantonese cultural identity. One important trigger for this second theme was a documentary film named 'The disappearing Goat City' (*zhengzai xiaoshi de yangcheng*). Produced by Wenjun Xie, an undergraduate student, this documentary circulated widely online. In the film, Guangzhou landmarks like the Xiguan arcades, the Dongshan Western-style buildings and the old city centre were presented as elements of the authentic physical image of Guangzhou – after all, they existed long before the dramatic urbanisation and development of the late 1990s and early 2000s. However, these landmarks were set to be demolished in order to make way for modern skyscrapers. A particular unease with this urban transformation emerged in the local Cantonese community, which was explicitly linked to the decline of the Cantonese language. As two interviewees said:

> 'We never can be quicker than bulldozers. If there is no way to prevent the arcades [*qilou*] from being demolished, we should at least *retain our collective memory and preserve the language*.' (Interview, 6 August 2014, emphasis added)

> 'Houses along the streets have been taken down, *taking away our memories*. Now you want to take down Cantonese. Who knows what will be left.' (Interview, 22 August 2014, emphasis added)

In trying to rescue their collective memory and the Cantonese language, some Cantonese groups advocated the coexistence of Cantonese and Mandarin, and the harmonisation of a homogeneous Chinese identity and a regional Cantonese identity. For instance, an editorial from *News Express* (7 July 2010) wondered: 'Can't Cantonese language and the Asian Games harmoniously get along with each other?' (*yueyu yu yayun buneng hexie xiangchu ma*). The editorial claimed that even if the city's cultural environment might be improved by launching Mandarin television programmes during the Asian Games, this mega-event would still be less impressive because Guangzhou would have lost its uniqueness when it lost the Cantonese language and the traditional cityscape.

Table 2: Generic chaining of the government responses

Date	Subjectivity	Genres	Main arguments
19 July 2010	Deputy Party Secretary of Guangzhou	Speech (interview)	'Promoting *Putonghua* and eliminating Cantonese' (*tuipu feiyue*) never existed
25 July 2010	*Guangzhou Daily*	Headline article	'Promoting *Putonghua* and eliminating Cantonese' is a 'pseudo-proposition'
28 July 2010	Guangzhou municipal government	Press conference	Five statements
4 August 2010	Party Chief of Guang-dong Province	Public speech	I am learning Cantonese now, who dares to abolish it?

Local versus other

The third theme centres on an exclusionary discourse that contrasts locals and non-locals. During the Cantonese language controversy, the evocation of authentic cultural symbols was coupled with the discursive (re)production of relations of difference. In a context in which Guangzhou – as the local residents' exclusive place, with a distinct language, culture and cityscape – was under threat, the boundaries between insiders and outsiders, or locals and non-locals (*waidiren*), were (re)produced more vehemently. Non-locals were presented as 'others', being 'different', 'outsiders' and sometimes 'enemies' (cf Colombo et al, 2012). The Cantonese language played a crucial role in this process as Cantonese speakers were classified as locals, while migrants who do not speak Cantonese were tagged as non-locals. For instance, one activist on a microblog argued that 'Guangzhou people speak only Cantonese; if you don't understand it, *go back to your countryside*'. The *strategy of the negative presentation of others* adopted here implicitly blames the migrant population for the decline of the Cantonese language and culture (emphasis added). Thus, various locals argued that their Cantonese identity was under siege because Guangzhou was flooded by *Putonghua*-speaking migrants from inland parts of China. The related discourse on non-Cantonese-speaking 'non-locals' is a symbolic resource that is used in group identity negotiation to maintain established social hierarchies. However, other 'locals' reflexively contended that this was a problematic strategy because it further undermined migrant workers, who were already marginalised in the existing socio-economic power structure. Furthermore, many migrant workers joined the Guangzhou 'locals' in resisting the state's hegemonic power of standardisation. Such an alignment is a telling manifestation of a shared counter-hegemonic strategy that crosses the local–non-local divide.

State response: a 'pseudo-proposition' (weimingti)

In order to pacify discontent, the Guangzhou municipality responded with a so-called presupposition strategy, which aims to make it socially or cognitively harder to challenge ideological assumptions. In particular, it used different genres – or particular forms of communication like transnational news media and organisational websites (Fairclough, 2006) – in its response, which it 'chained' together in particular ways (Fairclough, 2010). In the case of the Cantonese language controversy, the generic

Table 3: Extracts from the Guangzhou municipality counter-strategy

	Content	Source
Extract 1	The so-called '*Promoting Putonghua and eliminating Cantonese*' [*tuipu feiyue*] *never existed*. We [the Guangzhou government] never have the idea of weakening Cantonese and even eliminating Cantonese. *Putonghua* and Cantonese are not contradictory but complementary with each other in the process of building a National Central City and carrying forward *Lingnan* culture.	Interview with the Deputy Party Secretary of Guangzhou CCP, 19 July, *Southern Metropolis*
Extract 2	It is *not necessary to worry about the extinction of the Cantonese language*. The characteristic of *Lingnan* culture is its inclusivity and coexistence with diverse cultures. We need to *focus on the construction of a National Central City and an International Cultural City* under the banner of '*Welcome the Asian Games and embrace the New Life*'.	'Promoting *Putonghua* and eliminating Cantonese' is a 'pseudo-proposition', 25 July, *Guangzhou Daily*
Extract 3	1. 'Promoting Mandarin and eliminating Cantonese' *does not exist*	Five statements made at a press conference by Guangzhou municipal government, 28 July 2010
	2. Guangzhou government is committed to *preserve local excellent culture and the efforts are visible*	
	3. The proposal from Guangzhou CPPCC is in accordance with the legal procedure, representing the democratic politics. It does not equal the pseudo-proposition mentioned above	
	4. The public security organ will punish lawless activities, including misleading the public, spreading rumours and unlawful assembly	
	5. These are the final days for preparing for the Asian Games. Let us fight together to welcome the Asian Games and create the new life.	

chain included a speech (interview), a headline article, a press conference and a public speech (see Table 2). Together, this generic chain aimed to persuade the public that the Guangzhou government supported regional identity construction and preservation. Three extracts from this generic chain help to illustrate the response strategy of the Guangzhou government (see Table 3). They show that the main strategy was mitigation. In view of the upcoming opening of the Asian Games, the local authority chose not to increase tensions and to accept critique, but it was wary of organised protest. Extract 1 in Table 3 shows that the local authority aimed to neutralise criticism. Arguing that the public had misunderstood and overreacted to the proposal, the local authority insisted that the proposal was a simple suggestion from the local CPPCC. It was not an administrative order and had not been considered by the city's top leaders. Extract 2 in Table 3 is a newspaper headline from *Guangzhou Daily*, entitled '*Promoting Mandarin and eliminating Cantonese does not exist*'. This article reiterated the local authority's stance. However, the protesters did not seem convinced by these political genres. Extract 3 in Table 3 contains five statements extracted from a press conference on 28 July 2010 by the Guangzhou municipality after the mass rally two days earlier. Acting as a clarification of the government's position on the language conflict, the press release is a 'boundary' genre that links the fields of government and media. The first sentence

repeated the government's denial of the existence of an anti-Cantonese policy. This position was further stressed by the municipality's spokesman, Ouyang Yongsheng:

> Promoting Mandarin does not mean Guangzhou has to eliminate its dialect. The city government has never had such a plan to abandon or weaken Cantonese. Guangzhou government will continue to spare no efforts to conserve *Lingnan* culture including Cantonese language and the Cantonese genre of Chinese Opera. Cantonese language is still vibrant.

Statements 3 and 4 in extract 3 (see Table 3) defended the legitimacy of the proposal while putting the language protesters in a negative light. According to the local authority, the 26 July protest was organised by 'a small number of people with insufficient rationality and one or two with ulterior motives' and 'individual troublemakers would be punished'. The fifth statement relativised the controversy in view of the civic pride related to hosting the Asian Games. It suggested that individual and group interests should be sacrificed for the city's collective honour. The Asian Games were presented as a collective celebration of the city's achievements. Therefore, it had top priority over other issues, including the language controversy. These messages expressed the Guangzhou government's goals of calming the protesters by asking that the issue be temporarily put aside. However, the municipal government also recognised that this strategy of convincing protesters had it limits and eventually gave in with a proposal for bilingual Mandarin and Cantonese broadcasts. The pro-Cantonese movement thus achieved modest successes ahead of the Asian Games.

Discussion and conclusion

So, how did the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games become a crucible for the articulation of a regional Cantonese identity? What does this imply for the mega-event literature? Our analysis shows that the Cantonese language controversy has to be placed in a historical context that combines a longer-existing struggle over language and identity in response to national government policies to make *Putonghua* the national language, with the consequences of social transformation in response to economic reforms and the resulting dramatic migration. In this context, the Asian Games presented a 'strategic moment': while the municipal government used the Asian Games as a pretext to change the broadcasting language of Guangzhou Television Station to Mandarin, the pro-Cantonese groups used the Asian Games to convey their demands to a wider audience. While the authorities thus advocated a unitary Chinese identity, the protests signalled a different reality, highlighting the heterogeneous marking of the city and country. As a result of the confrontation of these two opposing views, the Asian Games became a temporary political space of discourse, competition, negotiation and compromise. Meanwhile, the protests were not framed in direct opposition to the Asian Games themselves. Rather, Cantonese groups were favourable towards the Asian Games and used them to further their regional culture. In this sense, the Asian Games acted as a crucible for Cantonese groups to claim their regional identity.

This analysis underlines the heterogeneous nature of social justice claims regarding mega-events. While the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games also resulted in claims for redistribution in relation to the evictions of urban villages (Gu, 2016), in the Cantonese language controversy, social justice claims targeted cultural injustice. As has become

clear, demands focusing on the recognition of difference rather than on economic justice fuelled the struggles of pro-Cantonese groups. This illustrates that mega-events are not only consciously employed by municipal and national governments for economic reasons; they can also have a clear cultural agenda. In the case of the Guangzhou 2010 Asian Games, that cultural agenda related to the eradication of difference, with the party-state promoting the standardisation of *Putonghua* and a homogeneous Chinese identity. Therefore, attention to cultural injustice needs to be a standard element in the analysis of mega-events. Our analysis suggests that even in an authoritarian state like China, the government's aims are not always realised. The government's proposals were met with intense local opposition from Cantonese groups, arguing for the protection of their language and regional *Lingnan* culture. This provoked one of the largest grass-roots social movements in recent history in Guangzhou, which eventually had modest success in delaying the Guangzhou government's strategy to popularise *Putonghua* in the public sphere.

Our analysis thus supports expanding the conception of social injustice in relation to mega-events; next to economic and political injustice, cultural misrecognition can be an important source of injustice in these events and needs to receive sufficient attention. However, following Fraser, we also argue that we need to keep the intersections between these injustices in mind. In our analysis, the importance of intersections became particularly clear when Cantonese was used to demarcate locals from 'others', and when this was translated into repressive attitudes towards the latter. After all, this threatened to jeopardise the social justice of migrants in a double way: first, as they are economically disadvantaged; and, second, because they would be further disadvantaged as 'non-locals'. Such an exclusionary framing of regional identity is also clearly at odds with Fraser's cautionary warning of an identity politics that is based on explicit group differentiation as a basis for political action. Strikingly, while various pro-Cantonese activists made a similar observation and criticised the effects of an exclusionary framing of regional Cantonese identity for migrants, at the same time, various migrants were supporting the pro-Cantonese activists. Therefore, while it is crucial to pay attention to cultural injustice next to other forms of injustice when studying mega-events, at the same time, the challenge is to build cross-group coalitions in response to those injustices that can help to eliminate forms of domination for all.

Notes

[1] This Chinese people's patriotic united front organisation is an important institution of political consultation led by the Chinese Communist Party.

[2] Throughout history, around the world, language has been instrumental in the establishment of dominance by suppressing minority languages. However, there are also contrary examples where minority languages receive active support. For a discussion of the revitalisation of minority languages in Europe, see, for instance, Lewis and Royles (2018).

[3] The pronunciation of *Putonghua* in Cantonese is similar to *Baodonggua*, which is translated as 'cook winter melon'.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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