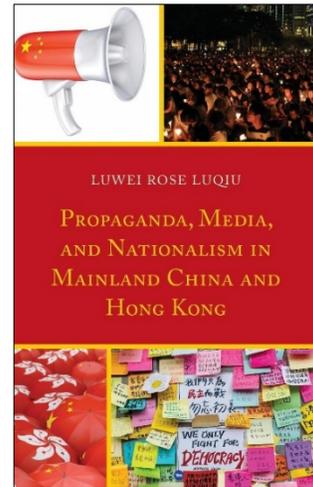


Luwei Rose Luqiu, *Propaganda, Media, and Nationalism in Mainland China and Hong Kong*, London, UK: Lexington Books, 2018, 170 pp., \$90.00 (hardcover).

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Published in 2018 and focused on the mediated collisions between Mainland China and Hong Kong, *Propaganda, Media, and Nationalism in Mainland China and Hong Kong*, by Luwei Rose Luqiu, is expected to be a timely contribution into the mechanism of propaganda in mainland China and explaining the role of media in the disturbing state of affairs in Hong Kong. The main body of this book is comprised of six chapters, with the first chapter providing the definition of propaganda, the second and third chapters unfolding the practices of China's state propaganda on four independence movements (Tibet, Xinjiang, Taiwan, and Hong Kong), and the final three chapters focusing on the specific case of Hong Kong. The author believes that this work "makes an original contribution to closing a significant research gap regarding how an authoritarian government attempts to coordinate its domestic and overseas propaganda strategies in order to influence people living in open societies" (p. 121).



In the first chapter, which is based on the literature review of the author's dissertation, efforts are made to conceptualize the notions of propaganda and nationalism and their relationship with media. Propaganda is defined as including

all the processes of persuasion and information delivery, but adds control over the flow of information, the management of public opinion, and the manipulation of behaviour patterns; its purpose is to promote the objectives of the sender, and it is not necessarily in the best interest of receiver. (p. 5)

Luqiu tries to form a systematic connection between the three core notions from the perspectives of communication theories, technology, and history. However, the correlation between propaganda, nationalism, and media remain unclear despite the discursive discussions on each of them. Besides, although it is the clear attempt of the author to cast a solid definition of propaganda, the review on the theories seems rather detached from the concrete context of China. Further contextualization of the theories with the case study of China and Hong Kong would be more helpful in terms of making this chapter more relevant to the rest of the chapters in the book. In contrast to reviewing theories and citing abstract quotes from established theorists, this opening would be more insightful if it started with empirical examples to illustrate how media works as propaganda and how nationalism is achieved from propaganda in mainland China.

The formality of chapter 2 is of a research paper, including an elaborative section on the research method. Such formality is also used in chapters 3 and 5, which adds a bit of a mixed style to the book. Chapter 2 examines the propaganda of nationalism in the mainstream media in mainland China based on

the four regional independence movements. According to the author, the techniques of the Chinese government's nationalist propaganda include but are not limited to "depicting challengers as enemies" and "using foreign political powers to criticize the West and praise China" (p. 41). Such strategies meet with counteractions in both Hong Kong and Taiwan, which motivate the growth of localism in the regions. The author notably tries to spell out as many facts as possible at the beginning of the chapter to solidify her arguments. However, oversimplified and fragmentary examples with no further illustration lead to seemingly assertive conclusions, which undermine the credibility of the author's opinions.

Chapter 3 measures the effect of nationalism propaganda in China. With the abundant evidence collected from online surveys on the Chinese social platform Weibo, the author reaches a conclusion that although mainlanders are "vulnerable when facing the huge propaganda machines" and "coordinate their behaviour with the government" due to structural coercion, "state propaganda still cannot win their hearts and minds" (p. 59). The main theoretical framework of this research is comprised of two theories which are "hostile media effect" (p. 46) and "third-person effect" (p. 50). The former refers to the "tendency of individuals with a strong pre-existing attitude on an issue to perceive media coverage as biased" (p. 47) and the latter assumes that people tend to believe that mass media has a stronger impact on other people rather than themselves. Luqiu uses "hostile media effect" to analyze the biased perception of mainlanders on Western media and "third-person effect" to explain why people in mainland China support censorship. The preexisting attitude of Chinese nationals toward foreign media and state propaganda is summed up by the author as the result of national education, which is reasonable but not adequately convincing without empirical evidence to underpin such assumption.

The last three chapters move to one of the major themes of this book, which is the mediated interaction between mainland China and Hong Kong. Chapter 4 talks about the penetration of mainland China into the local media industry in Hong Kong through its capital and political power. The author maps the panorama of Hong Kong media by studying the ownership of major media and digital media. Now, with the escalating technology of the Internet, the activities of both the alternative media and state surveillance are increasing sharply, making the battlefield growingly intense. Under such circumstances, the social activities for legislative independence in Hong Kong triggered polarized reactions in the public. Both supporters and objectors find their stances being represented on different media coverages sponsored by different interest groups. Chapter 5, therefore, provides longitudinal research on the dynamics of the framing contest between the agendas of state propaganda and local media. It also deploys the cascading activation model of Entman to "explain the mechanism of how thoughts and feelings spread throughout an individual's mind" (p. 83). In the case of the Hong Kong public, protests organized by grassroots activists prove that the soft repression of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) through media control achieved little. Chapter six further emphasizes the importance of media in mobilizing the activities of social movements in Hong Kong. Since the Umbrella Movement in 2014, media exposure plays an increasingly crucial role in framing and reframing the participation of young activists who seek support and funding mainly from social media platforms. A "master frame" of Hong Kong Independence in the media is cultivated by social movement groups of different pursuits to flag their consensus of "heightening the grievances of Hongkongers" (p. 115) and to mobilize supporters from different camps to join the protest. These three chapters expand on the struggles of the Hong Kong media in guarding their press freedom and the functions of media in supporting local activists. The failed mission of state propaganda from mainland China to

homogenize Hong Kong, in the view of Luwei Rose Luqiu, is because of the strong civic society and citizen expertise in Hong Kong, which are cultivated through its long history as a colony of "a different political system" (p. 97). In other words, Hong Kong represents an open society in which the state propaganda from a closed society like China is destined to have a countereffect.

The recent outbreak of novel coronavirus in mainland China cools down the fierce deadlock of the social conflicts in Hong Kong. However, the collisions between the two systems proceed as the threat from the mainland becomes concrete as a deadly disease. The eagerness for press freedom is now bursting on the mainland as public trust in government drops due to the mishandling of information about the virus. The bureaucratic information system leads to worsening situations, damaging the well-being of public at large both in mainland China and Hong Kong. In the sense of staying vigilant about the danger of heavy censorship to the benign development of a society, this work of Luwei Rose Luqiu is a critical reference to help people familiarize themselves with the mechanism of how propaganda works via state media in China. And the successful cases of alternative media in Hong Kong would be exemplary for media practitioners who are frustrated by reality. However, the dualistic classifications deployed in this book—"open society" and "closed society"—is problematic without solid illustration and does not help readers to better understand the substantial difference between the two systems. Also, some viewpoints proposed by the author are too absolute to be considered valid arguments. For example, the author claims that "the role of media has never changed since the establishing of the PRC in 1949" (p. 17). Such a claim ignores the friction inside the media industry and oversimplifies the complex news production in mainland China. Additionally, inconsistent wording and spelling mistakes are noted in the text. For example, "a studio called 'On the road of Renaissance'" (p. 8) and "Studio on Fuxin Road" (p. 11) are likely to describe the same media whose name on Wikipedia is "Studio on Fuxing Road," and "Interment" (p. 75) is believed to be "Internet." Small mistakes of this kind reduce the accuracy and reliability of the essential arguments in the book. Nonetheless, it is expected that with her veteran experience as a journalist, Luwei Rose Luqiu will contribute more valuable insight into revealing the indispensable role of media in social development.