Students' Reparticularization of Chinese Language and Culture at the University of Rwanda Confucius Institute

Amy Stambach, *University of Wisconsin–Madison*
Kevin Wamalwa, *University of Wisconsin–Madison*

ABSTRACT
This article examines the reparticularization of Chinese language and culture in a teaching-learning context at the University of Rwanda. It critiques models of dissemination that suggest direct inscription of semiotic value onto local contexts of use. Ethnographically, the article demonstrates that students' uptake of what their teachers deem real or authentic is in fact a metapragmatic reconstrual of teachers' lexemic tokens "real" and "original" that teachers enact in their teaching activities. Students' reconstrual incrementally alters teachers' sign values and links their users to one other. Students' reparticularized sign values, in turn, link their users to distinct activity routines beyond learning Chinese and kung fu in the classroom. The article argues that language and kung fu classes for students are one phase segment of larger sets of activities students undertake to become competitive in a challenging job market.

At the University of Rwanda Confucius Institute, students enrolled in Chinese language and kung fu classes reparticularize teachers' lessons about Chinese language and culture to fit their own social and economic needs. To analyze this reparticularization, we deploy Silverstein's (2013) trimodal

Contact Amy Stambach at 5321 Sewell Social Science Building, 1180 Observatory Dr., Madison, WI 53706 (amy.stambach@wisc.edu), Kevin Wamalwa at 5240 Sewell Social Science Building, 1180 Observatory Dr., Madison, WI 53706 (kevin.wamalwa@wisc.edu).

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semiotic of signification, circulation, and emanation and link it to Agha's (2012) analysis of mediatized projects at state peripheries. We argue that Rwandan students enrolled in Chinese language and kung fu classes reaffirm connections among themselves by recontextualizing teachers' sign values and connecting them to students' goals of employment. Students' reparticularized sign values, in turn, link their users to distinct activity routines beyond learning Chinese and kung fu in the classroom. In this case, Rwandan students take up and reparticularize Chinese language and kung fu to become competitive in the Rwandan job market.

Our setting is the University of Rwanda Confucius Institute, where Rwandan-born participants study kung fu and the Chinese language, and by extension Chinese culture, taught by students from universities in China. Designed to promote the teaching and learning of *Hanyu* (Mandarin Chinese), as well as to provide information and consultative services related to Chinese history, culture, economy, and society, the University of Rwanda Confucius Institute, like more than four hundred Confucius Institutes worldwide, offers courses and cultural events to university students, local teachers, government employees, members of the business community, and workers at Chinese-owned companies.[1] The teaching of kung fu and the Chinese language constitute the core components of Confucius Institute programming.

While some scholars have analyzed Confucius Institutes from an educational and managerial perspective (e.g., Cruickshank and Tsung 2011), most examine these Chinese programs from a perspective of soft power.[2] Among the most widely voiced criticisms of Confucius Institutes is the fact that they function as an arm of the Chinese state. Hiring and curriculum decisions are made in China; agreements with universities feature nondisclosure clauses that include concessions to Chinese politics and practices; and the institutes disregard the principles of shared governance by which faculty, not administrators, are recognized as curricular experts of their fields. For these and related reasons, the US-based American Association of University Professors has issued a statement urging against establishing Confucius Institutes and has called on higher education institutions already housing Confucius Institutes "to cease their relationship with the Chinese government or renegotiate their practices to support greater transparency and academic freedom."[3] Similar criticisms of Confucius

1. Confucius Institute Online, "About Us," http://www.chinesecio.com/.

2. See King (2013); Park (2013); Schmidt (2013); Hubbert (2014); Sahlins (2015); Leslie (2016); and Servaes (2016).

3. Edward J. Graham, "Confucius Institutes Threaten Academic Freedom," September–October 2014, American Association of University Professors, https://www.aaup.org/article/confucius-institutes-threaten-academic-freedom#.

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Institutes are registered in Rwanda, although less formally in that academic practices and governance there are more centrally and governmentally managed than in North America.

Our interest in understanding how sign processes work and are reparticularized across social encounters leads us to organize our analysis around the following questions: How are students' conceptions of language and culture revealed in language classroom and kung fu activities? What ideologies related to ascribed nationality do Rwandan students take up and reconstrue, given that students are learning Chinese in a context where the Rwandan government intends Kinyarwanda to signify post-genocide national commonality? What differently positioned standpoints do students produce and alter through their uptake and recontextualization of Chinese? Given our backgrounds as Africanists, our primary focus is on Rwandans' perspectives, not those of Chinese students or administrators.

The Post-genocide Context of Chinese in Rwanda

In Rwanda as elsewhere, the language one speaks, and chooses to speak, reflects a complicated history (Andersson et al. 2013). Officially, the government identifies Kinyarwanda as the national language and English as the language of commercial communication. However, as King observes (2014, 146), less than 5 percent of Rwanda's population speaks English. According to Nanda (2012), Chinese is a newly introduced foreign language meant to attract Chinese investment. Different orientations toward Chinese and English follow from colonial-era and national policies and from Rwanda's 1994 genocide, in which Rwandan authorities murdered approximately one million Tutsi plus thousands more moderate Hutu and Twa (Burnet 2012, 5). After the genocide, the Rwandan government announced that French was no longer an official language and, in 2009—the same year that the Confucius Institute opened at the University of Rwanda (then called the National University of Rwanda)—the government mandated that English should be used as the only medium of instruction beginning with the first year of primary school. By 2011, English was mandated as the primary language of instruction for all university classes.

Although the government's focus on French and English languages might suggest that Europe remains the government's primary international focus, China, too, has also figured in the government's past and future partnerships. Indeed, the Chinese presence in Rwanda across the past half-century mirrors China's relationship with other countries on the African continent (Dobler 2008; Monson and Rupp 2013; Stambach and Kwayu 2017). Between the

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1960s and the 1990s, China's orientation toward Africa shifted from support for anti-imperialist struggles to pragmatic economic engagement (Shinn and Eisenman 2012). Although the pre-genocide Rwandan government charged that China had helped train exiled Tutsis who attacked Rwanda (Larkin 1971, 183), the post-genocide government began to court new relationships. Shortly after a China-Africa international summit held in 2000, the Rwandan government began to encourage Chinese companies to build "infrastructure, schools, cultural facilities, sports grounds, administrative offices and social services" in Rwanda (Nanda 2012, 150).

Between 2007 and 2009, Chinese foreign direct investment in Rwanda rose from US$7.3 million in 2007 to more than US$50 million in 2009 and was paired with a US$37 million interest-free loan to rehabilitate roads in the capital city Kigali; a US$200 million fund to build a stadium; and an US$8.9 million fund to complete the Rwandan Ministry of Foreign Affairs office (Nanda 2012, 150–51). When the University of Rwanda Confucius Institute opened in 2009, Rwanda's Kagame regime had already turned its foreign policy and diplomatic ties toward the Asian giants (Honeyman 2016). With two classrooms, an office suite, and a library, the University of Rwanda Confucius Institute was one of more than twenty-five Confucius Institutes and seven Confucius Classrooms in twenty-one different African (Saharan and sub-Saharan) countries.[4]

Students' Recontextualized Uptake of Chineseness

To return to our question, How are students' conceptions of language and culture revealed ethnographically?, this section presents several students' accounts of evenemential moments of language and kung fu learning. Students worked hard to speak what teachers presented as "the real" Chinese and to perform "the real" kung fu, but they did not always imbue the lessons the same significance their teachers did. By the end of the second week of the January–April 2014 term, students' ideas about "real Chinese," which were different from those of their teachers, began to emerge.

In a lesson delivered at the end of the second week, one teacher admonished students for failing a mock examination, blaming their performance on their poor class attendance. But students saw another reason for their failure. One complained, "Please, teacher, next time you should not ask us Chinese characters. It

4. Research for this study was conducted from January through April 2014. The project generated a set of thirty-one interviews, seven focus-group discussions, and field notes on more than eighty hours of classroom, kung fu, and other event observations. Participants ranged in age from eighteen to twenty-five years. Most students were Rwanda-born; all teachers were from China. According to Kong (2016), the number of students enrolled in Chinese classes at the University of Rwanda Confucius Institute in 2014 totaled nearly 3,000—up from 209 in 2009.

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is very difficult to know them. Can't we just study in pinyin (phonemic, Latin script)?" "No," replied the teacher, also speaking English. "You have to be accustomed to using Chinese characters because when you go to China or work with Chinese people you will mostly use the characters. You have to study these characters by heart. I am telling you, this is real Chinese." Pointing to Chinese characters, she told them, "Pinyin is just for people who are not familiar with Chinese."

Sociolinguistically speaking, the teacher's multiple reasoning indexed an ambiguity. On the one hand, she sought to teach a standardized form, codified and circulated by the Hanban, the Chinese governmental offices that employ teachers and administer Confucius Institutes. On the other, she sought to adapt the lesson to students' possible experiences living and working in China (even though as we indicate later most students considered they were unlikely to live and work in China but instead might learn some Chinese so they could work with Chinese employers in Rwanda). This multiple message, embedded in many foreign language classes, differed from students' primary goal of mastering the language for everyday use and practical effect. Students recognized and appreciated that the teacher wanted them to speak standardized Chinese, but they also saw this standardization as less important than using the language for their own needs. To a point, students debated and disagreed with the teacher; they protested in the class when she, as they said, "forced" them to use Chinese characters. But their efforts to negotiate fell ultimately on deaf ears. Chinese characters remained the script.

A comparison of students' and the teacher's sense of "the real" Chinese suggests that where the teacher assessed "the real" in terms of numeric scores and speech accuracy, and held that Chinese characters iconize standard forms, students regarded themselves as Chinese speakers insofar as knowing the language helped to advance their own well-being and interests. For example, they asked the teacher to translate such particular words as *urubyiniro*, an open flat dancing place, and *umutsima*, a stiff porridge preferred by many Rwandans. Students anticipated that knowing these terms would help them better communicate Rwandan culture to Chinese coworkers and employers in Rwanda.

When pressed to explain why teachers' authenticity or originality mattered to them, students typically redirected discussion onto matters of jobs and economics. Phillip, for example, a twenty-three-year-old university student enrolled in second-year Chinese, noted, "China is an economically fast-growing country, one of the fastest in the world," and added, "Chinese people are becoming very friendly to African countries." His classmate Arthur, age twenty-eight, clarified what Phillip implied, that students are studying Chinese because "it will help us get jobs; look at all the new Chinese businesses opening up in Kigali."

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Important to note is that students never questioned the "realness" or "originality" of Chinese language as presented to them. Rather, they reasoned that using Chinese exactly as it was taught to them is not beneficial for their cause. Here, Agha's (2012) observation that institutional discourses are recentered when taken up at a state periphery is useful to our analysis. Teachers inscribed Chinese Hanban values of authenticity into their teaching activities (albeit reparticularizing them across new sets of encounters at this university), while Rwandan students, in turn, incrementally altered and linked these forms to their own interests in finding work in a competitive job market. Emblems disseminated at the state periphery, Agha explains, are revalued and changed across domains. This is the case when it comes to Chinese characters taught in the Rwandan setting: maintaining their iconicity—their "Chineseness," as teachers portrayed it—was not a priority for Rwandan students. The relationship between teachers' teaching of characters and students' ideas about what characters were good for, breaks down in the Rwandan setting. Consequently, we need to look at the uptake and recontextualization of emblematic forms in new social contexts, and at how Rwandan students revalue and relocate Chineseness in Rwandan contexts.

Students' Reparticularization of Ascribed Nationality as Indexed in Kung Fu

One way that students reparticularized "real" Chinese was in relation to ideologies of ascribed nationality. National language ideologies represent, produce, and legitimate social, linguistic, and cultural changes that favor particular communities (Silverstein 1979; Woolard 1998; Kroskrity 2000). People perceive linguistic and social differentiation extralinguistically, that is, through sign values that go beyond speech and linguistic competencies. In the Rwandan Confucius Institute setting, the lexemic tokens of real and original arose most notably in the activity of kung fu, a Chinese martial art similar to karate but characterized by more circular than linear bodily movements. To address our question, How do students reconstrue ascribed nationality in contemporary, post-genocide Rwanda?, we discuss in this section students' take on their experiences studying kung fu.

Three days per week, Theo, Louis, Joseph, and several others participated in a kung fu class, held in the university gymnasium. We observed kung fu classes for the better part of the course, and we spoke with students one-on-one and together to understand kung fu's significance for them. In one such group conversation, Theo, a University of Rwanda humanities major who was enrolled in kung fu and intermediate Chinese, explained,

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> One day I heard that here at the university there are Chinese people and that this is the place you can find kung fu. When I watch films, especially Chinese films, I see that kung fu is very important in everyday life. My mother knows that I like kung fu and she told me about this university course and so I came, I registered, and it was like miracle for me to have a Chinese master of kung fu.

Louis, a security guard at a small business in Kigali, added,

> At university, I knew there was a Chinese language class. I enrolled. But soon I had to drop because I faced other, more pressing demands. Yet the Chinese language teacher told me that I could learn Chinese by learning kung fu. Now I go to both kung fu and Chinese class. I'm in Chinese language level two.

Theo, Louis, and Joseph, another student, echoed the sentiment that "real Chinese people" could teach Chinese language and kung fu. Joseph noted, "Here at the university, the teachers are Chinese people; this is where you can find real kung fu." Louis added, "My expectation has always been to have a Chinese master."

In speaking about the "real," students used the root word *umwimerere* 'the original', or 'the right one', as in "Umwalimu wacu ni umwimerere" (Our teacher is original). They would also say, "Our teacher is an expert" (Umwalimu wacu ni umuhanga). But when it came to describing their own Chinese language and cultural skills, students referred to themselves as apprentices (*umwimenyereza*), not experts or originals. Students' search for "real" Chinese was in relation to Chinese nationality, it would seem. They concurred with teachers that Chinese nationality was located in China, but they wavered between the idea that language and culture reflect a people's unique experiences (a Herderian idea) and a nativist idea that holds that "human characteristics such as linguistic abilities are innate or inborn" (Blum 2013, 576).

In classroom discourse and kung fu practice, students saw "original" more often than teachers did as a quality that a person could acquire only by virtue of birth, not something a person could earn or achieve. Like the Confucius Institute curricula that subordinated non-Han ethnic groups to Chinese (Han) nationality, Rwandan students' own organizing trope appears to have been the nation, not a minority group or geography. "I no longer have 'ethnic identity' written on my national identity card [the way my father did]," remarked Emmanuel. Likewise, in China, he continued, "there is no difference today between people living in

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one region or another. Everyone there speaks Chinese the way everyone here knows Kinyarwanda."

Such emphasis on ascribed nationality made sense in this context of post-genocide Rwanda, when the Rwandan government sought to reassign citizens' identities in terms of nationality, not ethnicity. But whereas the Rwandan government framed the post-genocide citizenry in terms of a strong state and government, students, it seems, suggested the post-genocide population had to take care of and defend itself. Consider, for instance, how Emmanuel framed his Chinese learning in relation to what his father-soldier taught him before he died in 1994. Emmanuel explained,

> My father taught me many things. He was a soldier [for the RFP, Kagame's army of liberation that stopped the genocide]. When I went to secondary school, I studied kung fu but unfortunately my kung fu master was not Chinese. I was not proud of that. When I arrived here, I saw people doing kung fu. I was so happy to see that their master was a Chinese! I signed up for the course immediately.

Like others, Emmanuel implied that he studied kung fu to take charge of himself. "It is a form of self-discipline and protection," he said, "a way of defending [myself] if I'm attacked or robbed." Emmanuel's and others' recontextualization suggests students plan to use the Chinese language and kung fu to improve their lives; to secure jobs; to learn responsibility; to become disciplined; and to help themselves in a post-genocide Rwanda that they do not see as completely safe. What the teacher says "is" Chinese, and how (well) students adopt what the teacher says, are not what students value. Students' once-removed sense of their skill is evident in a turn of phrase that Theo used: "We are the second edition kung fu masters. Our teachers are the first."

From these materials, we venture that students are not suddenly, by virtue of being enrolled, now Chinese speakers or students of China. Nor do they see themselves as such. Rather, they see themselves as engaged in a recontextualized uptake of Chineseness, even as they also see themselves as in positions of becoming knowledgeable about kung fu and China. The dialectic of teachers' presentation and students' significations is coproduced sometimes feebly, and Chineseness emerges in fresh overlay with the creative effects of students' practices.

Tensions between Students' Language Play and Teachers' Goals

So far, our observations and interviews illustrate how sign processes work and how students reparticularize these sign values across new sets of social encoun-

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ters involving distinct actors. In this section, we will address our third question, What differently positioned standpoints do students produce and alter through their uptake and recontextualization of Chinese? We address this to illustrate how students link Chinese language and kung fu to distinct activity routines beyond those of the institute's programs. In the sense that we see students' recontextualization of Chinese as a form of cultural reworking or resignification, we argue that students create and perform, or play, a role when interacting with others. In this section on tensions between students and teachers, we will also equate "play" with light banter and will argue that the Rwandan students play with Chinese language in ways that mark their inclusion and exclusion within groups. Some casual interactions, again in kung fu classes, will illustrate this point.

One day toward the end of the kung fu course, Joseph, younger than the others, arrived late. Master Wu admonished him in Chinese, "You, you are late, you disrespect the class and master," referring to himself in the third person.

Emmanuel, who served as Master Wu's primary translator from Chinese to Kinyarwanda, repeated in Kinyarwanda, "The master says you are late and must do thirty push-ups before you join the class." Joseph hunkered down and obeyed while other students needled him. "You sneak in late and don't even greet the teacher!" snipped Philemon, speaking Kinyarwanda. "Do you think he doesn't see you?" "See me?" quipped Joseph, "He doesn't even have eyes," a rude, antagonistic comment referring to Master Wu's narrow eyes. In the post-genocide context of Rwanda, where ethnicity and physical differences are to be kept out of public discourse (Hutu and Tutsi, for example, are no longer acceptable markers of identity), Joseph's reference to his teacher's ethnic physical qualities is taboo. Indeed, a tr-lingual dictionary produced at the Rwandan Confucius Institute by a joint team of Rwandan and Chinese scholars defines "discrimination" as a "way of dividing people or things into groups and giving them different rights. Ethnic discrimination is the source of genocide," reads the trilingual Rwanda/Chinese/English sentence example (Yanzigiye et al. 2012, 118).

Attempts to ban discrimination fall short in many contexts. But to reduce Joseph's comment to the resignification of discrimination (now along Chinese and Rwandan lines) or to see it as evidence of students' dislike or resistance to their teachers would be too simple. Emmanuel noted that during class, "Everything is serious; it is an obligation, not a suggestion, to subordinate one's self to the teacher [and] to keep complaints away from him." But, he continued, "Af-

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ter class, the teacher is cool, humble, friendly; he draws students close to him, staying after class and making himself available to students to feel free to talk to him." Students' combination of pejorative commentary plus social closeness speaks to our point that semiotic partials and their assigned sign values in fact do not emanate from one center. Rather, they are reparticularized across various encounters involving new actors and linked to distinct activity routines of which being in the classroom and learning Chinese and kung fu is one particular segment.

Another day, before the master arrived, students joked in Kinyarwanda. They were practicing difficult moves they had learned the previous session. Feeling pain, Emmanuel swore, "Kungufu!" Everyone laughed. Kungufu in Kinyarwanda means rape, students explained. They also remarked that if you tell old people in the rural areas you are studying kung fu, they will ask you, "What did you say? You are studying *kungufu*?!" Again students laughed and signaled their sense of group inclusion. Sometimes they would even joke in front of the teacher. Such reparticularizations of powerful sign values were also evident in teachers' and students' interactional activities and language use.

One day the master started counting in Chinese: "This time you are going to jump higher," he informed the class, now in English (he spoke to them mainly using English). "Keep your arms on your back and part your legs. Jump, then sit down," he said. Then switching to Kinyarwanda, of which he knew a few phrases, he added, "Mirongo itatu" (Do this thirty times). Emmanuel translated for one of his kung fu classmates: "The master is telling you repeat this exercise and try to jump higher." "Okay? *Icumi*!" (Do it ten more times), the master confirmed in English and Kinyarwanda. But when one student began to count in English and jump from number to number, another laughed disparagingly: "Ha ha ha ha!! He is cheating the master. He is jumping from one to six then he reaches ten," skipping numbers to lessen the work. Kung fu students began to chat privately in Kinyarwanda, joking and laughing. Students seemed to know what they were talking about, though the researcher did not catch the details. The master smiled and watched students closely then asked, in English, "What's going on? What are you saying?" No one answered.

The teacher continued to yell commands, and students routinely followed. But toward the end of the session, students again used language and metaphor to signal inclusion into their student community. "Okay, we are finished," Wu concluded, "but first you must do fifty more push-ups," still speaking English. "But it's painful, master! We need to stop!" muttered one student, in English.

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To which the master replied, in English, "This is to make you strong!" Students, switching to Kinyarwanda, swore ("Kungufu!") and complained in Kinyarwanda to the master, "No, master, this is to make us *busaza*."

Busaza in Rwandan contexts refers to the brothers born of a shared patriline. Within a lineage, boys compete among themselves for power and inheritance—particularly for land and material resources they need to transact "bride wealth" (gifts, usually in the form of cattle, to a woman's family prior to marriage and to starting a family). Although rules of primogeniture and bride wealth are often undercut by modernity discourses and power grabs, they remain important organizing principles in post-genocide Rwanda (at least insofar as they are not overtly marked by tribe or ethnicity in today's Rwanda). We conjecture that perhaps students in this class regard kung fu and Chinese language study as grueling tasks that make them (not biological but social) brothers. Even as they share commonality in studying and practicing, they also undercut and challenge one another. As in sibships, so in kung fu: young men try to outsmart yet not destroy each other.

Whatever students' precise intent, *busaza* signifies brotherhood and reanchors competitive camaraderie in the metaphor of family. It also both excludes the teacher yet places him as figurehead. By choosing to speak Kinyarwanda in a context of a Chinese language school and kung fu class, students signal inclusion among comrades and partial exclusion of the master.

Our point in noting this is not just to observe that students enrolled in the Confucius Institute did not stop being Rwandan or flood the setting with images of their homelives. Those points are fairly obvious. Instead, we stress that students' reconstrual of language and kung fu incrementally altered sign values taught by teachers and linked them to students' experiences and goals. Such reparticularization is interesting because if one were to only watch and not also listen to what students said among themselves in kung fu class, one might think that students were bending their will the kung fu master and incorrectly assume they are passive actors in receiving instructions. That is not the case.

Communication dynamics in the kung fu class, as in the Chinese language classroom, evoked ideologies of "groupness" (Silverstein 2000; Agha 2007) in play with students' performances and significations of cultural identity. While we would not go so far as to say students were creating themselves as a new generation of Rwandans, we venture that they were remaking themselves socially in ways that went beyond that envisioned for them in the Hanban curriculum—and for that matter in the Rwandan official roadmap known as Vision 2020 (see Assan and Walker 2012). Students' contestations and pejorative language revealed the

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dynamism of their own recontextualizing strategies. In Silverstein's frame, these contextual and recontextualizing significations are "fundamentally indexical in character" (2013, 333). Students' reframed sign values indexed old and new understandings of positionality, knowledge, attitudes, and so on. They were nested and refracted within ongoing and often multiple intersecting circuits of exchange.

The comparatively higher proficiency of Rwandans in English than in Chinese made it difficult for most students to maintain a conversation with the kung fu master, thus requiring Emmanuel to translate for his classmates. Such translation happened simultaneously through language-in-use and interagent communication. Much of what was taken up in kung fu was not conveyed didactically but mimetically. Unlike classroom language instruction, Chinese and Rwandan language and culture were conveyed through social activity in the kung fu class. Varying language proficiencies among students and their teacher allowed students to differentiate between conversations for everyone and those that were in-group secrets. Emmanuel understood that Joseph's "joke" about the strenuous exercise that would make them *busaza* need not to be translated. His rudeness about the teacher's eyes enhanced the "us" and "them" dichotomy that every post-genocide Rwandan was meant to avoid in the interest of maintaining ethnicity blindness (even as this prohibition against discussing ethnicity may have also helped advance a goal of indexing Rwandan national identity against a foreign "other").

Discussions of Food, Legends, and Histories

In addition to indexing differences and similarities in language and kung fu activities, students and teachers projected differences onto discussions about food, legends, and history. An illustration from our field notes will indicate how expressions of similarity through difference emanated from different centers. The illustration comes from students' discussions in the second-year Chinese class taught at the Confucius Institute and, in particular, from an extracurricular activity held at the kung fu master's house.

Toward the end of the semester, Master Wu invited second-year language and kung fu students to dinner at his house, where he lived with other Confucius Institute staff. Students pooled their money to buy beer and soda. The master himself cooked fried rice and omelets and brought several rounds of food to the table for the students. (It is highly unusual for a teacher, especially a male teacher, in Rwanda to cook for students, though we cannot, for reasons of space, discuss this here.) At last, after working hard, the master sat down to talk. Conversation turned toward discussion as to why the students and the

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teacher decided to work together, what they appreciated about one another, and why they were studying and teaching kung fu. One of the more outspoken students began, in English:

> On behalf of my colleagues, I would like to say thank you, our master, because we have learned many things from you. Since I have joined kung fu club, I get advice from you every day. I have learned not only about kung fu but also about how to train my daily thoughts and actions. This will help me for the rest of my life.

Other students reinforced this message and one by one thanked the master. The exchange occurred in English and those who were not able to communicate as they wished asked their friends to translate from Kinyarwanda. Likewise, the master asked Emmanuel to translate from Chinese to English.

Toward the end of the appreciation, Phillip announced, "So, Master Wu, we have brought you a small gift. It is small, but we will continue [doing] this [practice of giving you small gifts] because this is just the beginning." The students proceeded to present their teacher with a chicken, a traditional gift in Rwanda.

The master laughed with happiness, clearly pleased with the chicken. He used the occasion to invoke a Chinese legend about how chickens are important to Chinese people. He explained, "Chicken gave its horns to the dragon, and that is why chicken does not have horns. The chicken is important because the Chinese regard it as a helper of god." Metonymically, both chicken and dragon in this exchange constituted a key symbol of their communities. For the teacher, his students' gift signified the Rwandans' support for the Chinese "dragon." For students, chicken in local African contexts is a valued domestic bird that often represents honor and respect when slaughtered or presented to a guest. Taken together, the giving and receiving of the chicken constituted linked cycles of cultural reentextualization: from students to teacher, and from teacher to students.

For the students, the reparticularization of the chicken-dragon story into the gift-giving practices with which they were familiar linked the sign value of the chicken to its users and its users to each other. Rwandan chickens were like Chinese dragons, even though the teacher's intervention placed the chicken otherwise: as a precursor to the Chinese dragon, an anthropomorphized entity signifying a gift "from heaven" that follows historically after the chicken. Yet by using this chicken as emblematic of a people and "a culture," students and teachers linked their different metapragmatic construals of sociality and exchange. In the midst of language differences, close-up connections via equivalences led participants to draw connections. Even as participants avoided

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mentioning the idea that Rwandans and Chinese were similar, their engagement around shared anthropomorphizations suggested that they shared differently positioned but not incongruent standpoints on Chinese.

Looking beyond Authentic(ating) Discourses

As the above ethnographic and interview materials suggest, rather than directly disseminating semiotic value from the Hanban or Rwandan government to Rwandan students, Chinese language and cultural programming at the University of Rwanda structured interactional behavior among new actors who altered and linked Confucius Institute lessons to new sign values and routines. Within the institute, students studied Chinese language to enhance their own employment opportunities; they used Chinese language to confirm in-group status with other Rwandans; and they used kung fu for mastery of mind and body in a context where the state security systems historically have failed. In the language class, students' efforts to convince their teacher to use pinyin was not successful, even though, as students saw it, pinyin was itself Chinese; pinyin was the form they needed to get jobs and make connections. Likewise in the kung fu class, the master insisted on repetition as a means to achieve the highest standards, yet students protested in English that "It's painful" and tried to convince the master they were already becoming strong enough, already on their way to using kung fu to defend themselves. Thus, interactions between a Chinese teacher (and kung fu master) and Rwandan students were phase segments of larger social processes, semiotically reparticularized across social settings.

These phase segments were, in turn, recentered pragmatically in sign values particular to the social settings and open to recontextualization. "Real" or "original" Chinese for students lay in making something out of language learning and language-in-use that was locally relevant, rather than purely mimicking an original form. This is important for illustrating that significations emanating from institutional or state government centers are not totalizing. Confucius Institute teachers sought to teach a standard language, itself emanating from the authoritative Hanban. But our data and analysis suggest that any essentializing and bounded concept of linguistic or cultural center of authenticity was quickly subject to students' semiotic refigurations and contextual reemplacement.

Without a doubt, the governing principles at the core of Confucius Institutes (their top-down and centralized administrative structure by which content is strictly managed and controlled) affront shared governance models that are key to academic freedom and scientific integrity. Yet even within the authoritarian and didactic organization of the Hanban, authentic(ating) narratives and Confucius Institutes as authorizing agencies are less totalizing than official discourses

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would suggests. Confucius Institutes are among other centers from which instructional language regimes and semiotic practices emanate—including, in this Rwandan setting, a context where English and Kinyarwanda are meant to signal opportunity and nationality.

Given all of this, what might be the significance of Chinese language and cultural programming in the post-genocidal context of Rwanda, where explicit mention of ethnicity and cultural identity is to be avoided? Our research suggests that a performed recontextualization of a modified sense of Chinese culture is mediated by the Rwandan state's own regimes of signification immanent in language and education policy. Circulating state discourses of Rwandan colonial history and European language policy—by which English replaced French as an instructional medium meant to propel the country forward, and by which Chinese classes were introduced in the context of the state's attempt to find new economic partners for the country—helps to resituate, semiotically, Rwanda beyond European colonialism and genocide. It also aligns yet differentiates Rwandan post-colonialism with Chinese economic and political expansion, framing this relationship in the first instance not as neoimperialist or authoritarian but as an encounter of authorizing Chinese and Rwandan state discourses that partly and imperfectly overlap.

In cases depicted in the sociolinguistic literature (mostly mid- to late twentieth-century accounts of postwar and postcolonial nationalisms), analyses of nationality ideologies often focus on heritage languages and nation-state ideologies, seeing authentication as a matter of reproducing and disseminating shared and translatable forms. Our analysis, in contrast, bypasses that discussion by averring that rather than being a mere dissemination of nation-state or heritage ideologies from centers to peripheries, semiotic partials and their assigned values are reparticularized across new sets of social encounters with distinct actors, linking actors to one another in rather distinct ways and linking these semiotic partials to distinct activity routines, such as learning a language in order to be competitive in a challenging job market.

Conclusion

This case study advances the following ethnographic and conceptual arguments: Ethnographically, it showcases that the metapragmatic construals of "real" Chinese exhibited in teachers' talk and students' activities are not contradictory but are distinct types of formulations that speak to differently positioned standpoints on Chinese; that students' and teachers' reparticularized sign values of speech link their users not only to distinct activity routines, such

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as mock examinations and memorization of characters, but also to ideologies related to ascribed nationalities; and that students' use of Chinese language and kung fu recenters the organicity of a nation-state conceived as a bounded space whereby language unifies populations. Culturally resonant sign values—such as pinyin, kung fu, and chicken—anchor sign practices through which students see their differences with teachers as similar.

Conceptually, this study contributes to sociolinguistic and anthropological understandings of how sign processes work and are reparticularized across social encounters. It shows that models of dissemination that assume top-down inscription of value onto local contexts are recentered and reparticularized, not disseminated from a single center, and that "real" or "authentic" sign values (of Chinese or kung fu, our foci) exceed the very moment of practitioners' making and raise the question of original authenticity. Instead, metapragmatic construals of sign values of speech and practice are phase segments of larger sets of activities—an analysis that highlights how "originary" culture is semiotically refigured not in the course of language or culture teaching but through ongoing sociocultural interpretive creation.

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