Abstract

Hong Kong and Mainland China have undergone a difficult and painful process of integration since the British colony's handover to China under an unprecedented structure of “one country, two systems.” Decades of separation has embedded in people in both societies different perceptions and orientations of each other, which have played a salient role in the integration process. Given the stringently controlled intra-country border, Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese journalists who are responsible for constructing realities of both societies on a daily basis stand out as key players in “coorientation.”

This study examined the perceptions and mutual perceptions of Hong Kong and Mainland journalists on four issues that are central to the integration of the two societies: the national identity of Hong Kong people, the political governance of Hong Kong, the Hong Kong-Mainland economic integration, and the perception of each other’s general images. Based on the coorientation theory and previous coorientational studies, this study attempted to examine the coorientation patterns of two parallel groups of journalists from two interrelated but distinct societies.

A questionnaire survey was conducted on a total of 323 journalists in Beijing (221) and Hong Kong (102). Questions were designed to examine the respective perception and estimated perception of the two groups on the same issues using the measurements of agreement (between perceptions of the two groups), congruency (between one group’s perception and estimated perception) and accuracy (between one group’s perception and the other group’s estimated perception). The study found that the two groups of journalists demonstrated disagreement, incongruence and inaccuracy on most issues.

On the cultural dimension of Hong Kong people’s national identity, the result showed that the Hong Kong journalists held a strong “Hong Kong” identity. Although they identified with the cultural aspect of the national identity, they did not hold such an identity as strongly as their Mainland counterparts, and they
also underestimated the Mainland side’s strong affiliation. By contrast, the Mainland journalists accurately estimated the Hong Kong side’s weaker agreement and reservations on this issue. On the political dimension of Hong Kong people’s national identity, the two groups had fundamental disagreement with each other and estimated the other group to hold different perceptions from their own.

On Hong Kong’s political governance and specifically on the democratic prospect of Hong Kong under China’s sovereignty, the two groups took opposite stands, with the Mainland side being optimistic whereas the Hong Kong side pessimistic. They estimated the other group to hold a different perception. The Mainland side underestimated Hong Kong’s pessimism while the Hong Kong side expected little from the Mainland side on its support for this issue.

On Hong Kong-Mainland economic integration, the two groups demonstrated a pattern of dissensus coorientation state in that they had an accurate knowledge of the other side’s perception but didn’t agree with each other.

On perception of each other’s general images, the Mainland journalists overestimated the Hong Kong side’s agreement to the positive descriptions of “Mainlanders” whereas the Hong Kong journalists underestimated the Mainland’s positive impression of the Hong Kong people.

This study contributes to the literature of coorientation by applying the theory to a broader cross-cultural context and adding new patterns to coorientation state systems. The conceptual framework it has tested can be applied to the general public at large and other social contexts.