



***Youth climate activism from the Global South:
Constructing a youth-led global climate public
sphere with a case study of Hong Kong***

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Wendi Li is a PhD candidate at the School of Culture and Communication, University of Melbourne. In her PhD project, she researches young people's communication experiences and identity formation in relation to climate change in Hong Kong and Melbourne. Her research interests lie in the intersection of civic agency, global cities, and comparative approaches in the context of globalisation and climate emergency.

In this article, I bring literature on youth climate activism into conversation with global public sphere theory to conceptualise a 'youth-led global climate public sphere' from a citizen-centred perspective. Research has shown that a global public sphere has emerged around the theme of climate change primarily comprised of media debates, whereas the civic dimension of such a sphere, especially the citizens' contribution, has been understudied. The civic agency of global youth publics has manifested in the rise of global youth activism on climate change since 2019, which offers a new perspective to theorising an issue-specific public sphere on the global scale. Therefore, I suggest that a youth-driven global climate public sphere is unfolding, with young people becoming not only the leading force of climate activism worldwide but also the main actors of today's globalised public climate communication.

To outline the contours of this emerging structure, I present the case study of activist communication practices by Bye Bye Plastic Bags Hong Kong (BBPB HK), the local chapter of a youth-driven international environmental initiative that aims to reduce plastic waste, empower young generations, and galvanise people into daily climate actions. This case is chosen to demonstrate how young individual citizens in Hong Kong have contributed to the production of critical climate discourses through their activist communication practices as the direct formation, expression, and concretisation of public opinion in a globalised context.

By conducting in-depth interviews with organising members of BBPB HK, along with participatory observation, I investigate how these young Hong Kongers engage with climate activism in a local-global nexus in everyday settings, moving beyond the national scale and digital spaces. First, I report a strong sense of self-empowerment among these young climate activists as the central feature of the youth-led global climate public sphere, with them highlighting the identity of being self-empowered youth on every possible occasion. Second, I identify three sets of activist communication practices adopted by BBPB HK members: (1) creating networked communication spaces by developing their own discourses about climate change; (2) organising individualised yet collective actions of combating plastic waste in particular and climate pollution in general; (3) collaborating with other sister chapters globally and like-minded stakeholders locally on tackling climate crisis.

Unlike mainstream youth climate activism characterised by protests, sit-ins, and demonstrations in the West, BBPB HK's activist communication practices are less confrontational and more action-oriented. Instead of pressuring the government or corporations to take climate actions, they seek collaboration with all stakeholders with climate concerns or relevant potential to address climate change locally and globally. The most notable example is that they work together with emerging green businesses to promote climate awareness. For this reason, BBPB HK's case study provides an alternative understanding of youth climate activism that is globally localised in the Global South. Meanwhile, the rise of global youth publics in a Chinese global city points to the increasingly intensified local-global communicative connectivity between China, a Global South country, and an ever-increasingly globalised world.



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