

**The NBA as a Platform for Political Rhetoric:
The case of Daryl Morey, Hong Kong and the
Chinese government**

by
Alan McTavish

B.F.A. (Film Studies), Concordia University, 2017

Extended Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

in the
School of Communication (Dual Degree in Global Communication)
Faculty of Communication, Art and Technology

© Alan McTavish 2020
SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Summer 2020

Copyright in this work rests with the author. Please ensure that any reproduction or re-use is done in accordance with the relevant national copyright legislation.

Approval

Name: Alan McTavish
Degree: Master of Arts
Title: The NBA as a Platform for Political Rhetoric: The case of Daryl Morey, Hong Kong and the Chinese government
Program Director: Katherine Reilly

Courtney Szto
Senior Supervisor
Assistant Professor

Katherine Reilly
Program Director
Associate Professor

Date Defended/Approved: August 31, 2020

Abstract

This essay introduces additional insights to literature which examines a social media post by Daryl Morey; a general manager of a National Basketball Association (NBA) franchise who on October 4, 2019 published a graphic which professed support for a protest movement occurring in Hong Kong and has sparked retaliation from Chinese business and government entities against the NBA. I first evaluate the NBA as a sports league which permits its actors to speak about political issues to contextualize and highlight Morey's action of publishing this graphic. I then examine the NBA's history in China to reveal potential ideological incongruities between the American-based NBA and Chinese government. Finally, I detail the polarizing convictions about the Chinese government's jurisdiction over Hong Kong and the visceral discourse surrounding the severity of Morey's tweet to scrutinize the contentious opinions about his action domestically (United States) and internationally.

Keywords: National Basketball Association; Hong Kong; China; Chinese government; social media; social movements

Table of Contents

Approval.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures.....	v
Introduction	1
Theoretical Perspectives	4
The NBA as a platform (for political rhetoric)	6
The NBA as a platform for political rhetoric	7
The NBA in China	9
China: basketball and sport.....	11
The NBA and China	12
Hong Kong and the Chinese state.....	16
Daryl Morey’s tweet: responses and debates	18
Responses internal and external to the NBA.....	20
Response and reaction from within China and from Chinese government officials	25
Enes Kanter and the Turkish government	28
Daryl Morey: an activist?.....	29
Conclusion	33
References.....	34
Primary Sources.....	34
Secondary Sources.....	35

List of Figures

Figure 1	Tweet published by Daryl Morey which condones the plight of the pro-democracy Hong Kong protest movement.....	1
Figure 2	Lebron James and Kyrie Irving wearing “I Can’t Breathe” t-shirts in December 2014, echoing the final words of Eric Garner who was killed by a police choke-hold earlier in 2014.....	8
Figure 3	Manipulated version of the NBA logo posted on Twitter by Chinese graphic artist, Rebel Pepper (psudonym), showing the anonymous figure of the NBA logo bowing to the National Flag of the People’s Republic of China.	21
Figure 4	Left: cartoon by Gary Varvel depicting Lebron James in Chinese military regalia; Right: two incongruous pictures of Martin Luther King, Jr and James with verbatim quotes.	22

Introduction

This essay examines an ongoing case study, where on October 4, 2019 general manager (GM) Daryl Morey of the National Basketball Association's Houston Rockets franchise published a tweet which professed sympathy and support for the pro-Democracy protest movement occurring in Hong Kong (Cha & Lim, 2019, p. 23); an action which set off a chain of events that has culminated in the disruption of the NBA's foothold in Chinese economic markets (p. 25). The tweet (Figure 1) shared a graphic made by Hong Kong activist group Stand With Hong Kong, which read "Fight for Freedom, Stand with Hong Kong", and its sharing by Morey subsequently provoked visceral debates and commentary publicly occurring through the media from actors both external and internal to the NBA (Perper, 2019; Cha & Lim, 2019, pp. 33). In the following days, it was announced by both private and state-run Chinese broadcasters that all National Basketball Association (NBA) games would be removed from Chinese media platforms (Cha & Lim, 2019, p. 30; Perper, 2019). My analysis of this case pertains to scrutinizing the retaliation from Chinese state and business entities, and the debates which occurred internal and external to the NBA in response to Morey's post; who was accused of "challenging [China's] national sovereignty and social stability" for sharing a graphic sympathetic to the pro-democracy Hong Kong protest movement (Perper, 2019).



Figure 1 Tweet published by Daryl Morey which supports the plight of the pro-democracy Hong Kong protest movement.

From: Norman Hermant on Twitter [@NormanHermant]; October 6, 2019

On October 6th, the NBA issued an official statement via its Chief Communications officer, which read:

We recognize that the views expressed by Houston Rockets General Manager Daryl Morey have deeply offended many of our friends and fans in China, which is regrettable. While Daryl has made it clear that his tweet does not represent the Rockets or the NBA, the values of the league support individuals' educating themselves and sharing their views on matters important to them. We have great respect for the history and culture of China and hope that sports and the NBA can be used as a unifying force to bridge cultural divides and bring people together. (Perper, 2019)

The NBA had to clarify its stance shortly after due to the perceived ambiguity surrounding the its statement. What was "regrettable"? That it had angered the Chinese government? That Morey had consequentially exercised his American right to freedom of expression? The league's commissioner Adam Silver eventually stated in an interview on October 17th, that the "regrettable" notion was referring to upsetting the league's Chinese fans and not to the Chinese government, and that the league was backing Morey's right to freedom of expression and bearing the financial losses for not firing him, as he claimed the Chinese government was demanding they do (Gregory, 2019).

This dichotomy between making public statements about domestic and international human rights abuses by NBA actors is significant because the NBA under the guidance of Silver had become an organization which professed to encourage the commentary of its actors regarding issues important to them (Gregory, 2019; Cramer, 2019). It is under this guise that the NBA has been set apart from other American based professional sports leagues (like Major League Baseball, the National Hockey League, and the National Football League) for permitting such open discussion about political issues. In fact, the NBA has garnered notoriety for officially supporting and condoning such commentary from its actors. And while Silver has publicly professed support for Morey as a private American citizen exercising his right to freedom of expression via his a personal social media account, the NBA appears to be taking actions to suppress any further affiliation with the pro-democracy Hong Kong protest movement, such as shunning questions from the press towards NBA players about the matter (Coleman, 2019), and preventing activists and NBA fans from making statements which pertain to Hong Kong and NBA events (Perper, 2019).

Internal to the NBA, it seemed the league was on damage control by carefully trying to appeal to the sensibility of Chinese fans and/or Chinese state actors via the statements of various NBA actors.

I don't want to get into a word or sentence feud with Daryl Morey, but I believe he wasn't educated on the situation at hand, and he spoke, and so many people could have been harmed, not only financially, but physically. Emotionally. Spiritually. So just be careful what we tweet and what we say, and what we do. Even though yes, we do have freedom of speech, but there can be a lot of negative that comes with that too. (Scott, 2019).

The above is a quote from LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers made on October 14, about Morey's tweet (Scott, 2019). James is arguably the most famous current NBA superstar both domestically and internationally (Johnson et al., 2020, p. 5), and whose jersey sales in China were recently the highest of any NBA player (Yuan, 2018). James is also a figure who has embraced his positionality as immensely famous to speak about issues of significance to him (Johnson et al., 2020, p. 5); after the 2014 police killing of Eric Garner in New York City, in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter activist movement in the United States, James wore a t-shirt in a pre-game warmup which brandished the slogan "I Can't Breathe", echoing Garner's last words (seen in Figure, 2) (Johnson et al., 2020, p. 6). His commentary has also extended beyond slogans, using press conferences and interviews to critique systemic racism in the United States: "I have this platform, and I'm somebody that has a voice of command, and the only way for us to get better as a society and for us to get better as people is love, and that's the only way we're going to be able to conquer something as one" (Umoh, 2017, as cited in Johnson et al., 2020, p. 6). Johnson et al., (2020) label James a "modern athlete and activist" according to his commentary and philanthropy (pp. 5-6). As will be discussed in section 1.5, critiques of James emerged regarding his chastising of Morey's tweet considering that the issues he comments on do not necessarily extend to other perceived instances of human rights abuses.

Regarding non-NBA actors, the league was being criticized by media outlets, fans, and even politicians for appearing to be prioritizing its finances over freedom of expression by not being more firm on alleged human rights abuses at the hands of the Chinese government during the protest movement occurring in Hong Kong (Perper, 2019; Cha & Lim, 2019). Fans began bringing signs to games bearing slogans such as "Free Hong Kong" and "Google Uighurs", with some being removed from games by

security for voicing their support of anti-Chinese government sentiments (Perper, 2019; Cha & Lim, 2019, p. 31). These slogans are significant, as they each address ongoing alleged instances of jurisdictional and human rights violations by the Chinese government, such as their response to the pro-democracy protests, and their alleged detention of over one million Uighurs (a Muslim minority in China) in internment camps in the Chinese province Xinjiang (“Apple and Nike Urged to Cut ‘China Uighur Ties,’” 2020).

Theoretical Perspectives

My analysis builds upon a recent study by Victor Cha and Andy Lim (2019), who argue that the NBA should bear the financial losses procured by advocating for Daryl Morey’s American right to freedom of expression. It is the authors’ idealistic rationale that the NBA, who continues to increase its presence abroad, should not seek to antagonize in international markets, but must also not kowtow to foreign governments who may not share similar ideologies about the tolerability of one’s freedom of expression (pp. 24, 32). In the context of this case, Cha and Lim (2019) refer to the concept of “predatory liberalism” to describe how Chinese entities “[leverage] the vulnerabilities of market interdependence to exert power over others in pursuit of political goals..., [using] its market as a compellent tool to achieve political objectives” (pp. 24, 28). Like Cha and Lim (2019), I detail the contentious nature of the protest movement to describe how entities in China, namely its government, perceive this protest movement to be a challenge to its sovereignty, and how Morey’s tweet was deemed a challenge to Chinese internal affairs. To do so, I will implement an interpretative and qualitative discourse analysis which examines the discourse surrounding this case study.

First, I introduce a contextualization of the NBA as a platform for the dissemination of political statements, where NBA actors have been permitted to use their notoriety via their affiliation with the league to disseminate statements on issues of significance to them (Cramer, 2019; Gregory, 2019; Kirby, 2019; Laird, 2014). It is upon this premise that Morey has not been penalized for his tweet, an action which is deemed to have strained the relationship between China and the NBA. Next, I detail the origins of the NBA’s economic foothold in China to highlight that the circumstances of the league’s expansion into China are unique considering the other conditions of the NBA’s globalization efforts. In my final section, I provide a brief overview of the pre-existing

tensions surrounding Hong Kong and mainland China before highlighting the responses from actors central to the case; as providing an overview of the tensions between Hong Kong and mainland China permits an understanding of the purveying ideologies about the Chinese government's jurisdictional reach and global economic impact.

It is useful here to provide an articulation of 'ideology' for this essay due to prevalent discords between about what is acceptable political rhetoric. As such I implement a definition of ideology which is borrowed from an article by James R. Schiffman (2017), which critically analyses narrative constructions of Chinese and American ideologies through media dissemination. This analysis implements a definition of ideology in a "modified Althusserian sense" (p.14), where it "amounts to a worldview – a set of values or an articulation of a cultural narrative – that is naturalized as unproblematic" (Althusser, 1970; Huisman, 2005b, pp. 11–27, as cited in Schiffman, 2017, p.14), and "as a system of values and beliefs that a state wished to impose" (Schiffman, 2017, p. 14). Thus, in the context of this paper when referring to ideology, it will be as a set of values according to an actor's reference to, or proclamation of, "ideologies" in accordance to the political, economic, and/or cultural allegiances in a Sino-American context.

Ultimately, this essay introduces additional insights to existing literature which has examined this case (e.g., Cha & Lim, 2019; Dynel & Poppi, 2020). By evaluating the NBA as a professional sports league with an attribute of permitting its actors (players, coaches, staff, executives, team owners, etc.) to speak about issues of significance to them, Daryl Morey's tweet demonstrates an action of how this characteristic has become an economic burden regarding the NBA's transnational economic foothold in China. As my overview of the league's history in China (and China's relationship with basketball and sport more generally) reveals is that there exist incongruities between the American-based NBA and Chinese government regarding what is suitable political rhetoric. As such, by also detailing the polarizing and dichotomous convictions about the Chinese government's jurisdiction over the Hong Kong region, the visceral discourse surrounding the severity of Morey's tweet can be scrutinized to reveal the contentious opinions about his action both domestically (to the United States) and internationally (e.g., Hong Kong; mainland China). In doing so, I expose Morey as an unextraordinary figure in terms of his political activist tendencies; albeit a figure whose actions here have exacerbated

political tensions embedded within the dynamic of economic trading by the American-based NBA and the People's Republic of China (or China).

The NBA as a platform (for political rhetoric)

Before discussing how the NBA professes itself to provide a platform for NBA actors to speak about issues of significance to them, it is significant to understand the NBA as a platform for the dissemination and commodification of the live game of professional basketball by NBA franchises. It is upon this premise that the NBA has expanded its reach transnationally (as will be discussed in the following section), and that NBA actors are able to achieve celebrity, who then may use this recognition to make political statements such as LeBron James. The mechanisms that disseminate NBA related content are understood according to Jingxuan Zheng and Daniel S. Mason's book, *Brand Platform in the Professional Sport Industry* (2018). Zheng and Mason detail the evolution of professional sports according to their relationships with the media in domestic and transnational contexts, describing their analysis according to the study of platforms and platform theory. I borrow from their book an articulation of media platforms which broadly describes them as part of technological strategies in providing a type of information service via the distribution of content to reach consumers (pp. 1-3).

In the context of professional sports, Zheng and Mason (2018) argue that platform ecosystems emerge around the core product of professional sports leagues, which is the live game of that sport (p. 3). It is through the marketing of this product that these leagues strive to "invite the largest possible number of platform constitutive agents (such as fans, television networks, corporate sponsors, and new media technologies) to [engage]" (p. 53). As such, regarding the NBA and other sports leagues, these "platform ecosystems" have come to include additional commodity elements such as broadcasting deals in both domestic and in international markets (including a prominent social media presence), and mechanizing (sales of team jerseys, videogames, etc.) (pp. 73-74). But as will be expanded upon when discussing the globalization of the NBA in the following section, its stars and their public behaviour are intrinsic elements of commodification by the league in its marketing initiatives, a notion which has evolved to embrace activist actions by NBA actors.

The NBA as a platform for political rhetoric

Adam Silver has (and continues to be) lauded as a unique professional sport commissioner for his measured responses to hardships felt by NBA actors caused by instances of perceived injustices; a sentiment which was not always attributed to previous commissioner, David Stern (Cramer, 2019). For context, the following is a quote by Stern from 2006 where he professes to disregarding alleged human rights abuses in China in favour of the leagues bottom line: “Believe me, the China situation bothers me. ... But at the end of the day, I have a responsibility to my owners to make money. I can never forget that, no matter what my personal feelings might be.” (Stein, 2019). It should be noted here, that while Silver has condoned Morey’s right to freedom of expression on multiple occasions, he has been careful to not take a critical stance on the alleged human rights abuses by the Chinese government (Gregory, 2019). However, his abstaining from challenging the Chinese government appears to be in step with other American-based corporations like the sportswear brand Nike and the multinational technology company Apple, who are each alleged to be benefiting from the forced labour of the Muslim minority Uighurs, but claim no wrongdoing in the manufacturing they source from China (“Apple and Nike Urged to Cut ‘China Uighur Ties,’” 2020).

Regardless of this, there is evidence to suggest that under Silver the NBA has become more racially and politically progressive, including condoning commentary by NBA actors on issues of significance to them (Gregory, 2019; Cramer, 2019, p. 283). In a rhetorical analysis and critique of Silver and Stern, Lindsay M. Cramer (2019) asserts that Silver has “situated himself as “progressive” by distinguishing himself from Stern who often utilized paternalistic rhetoric to maintain control of players” (p. 279). Such distinctions include the reversing of a dress-code implemented by Stern, “which banned various expressions of hip-hop culture via fashion” in what Cramer (2019) referenced as an act of “anti-blackness” (p. 286). Most notably, however, was the 2016 removal of Donald Sterling as the owner of the Los Angeles Clipper, when Silver forced the sale of the franchise from Sterling after it emerged that he made vehemently racist comments about Black people, including those who played on the basketball team he owned (Cramer, 2019).

In her article, Cramer’s (2019) overarching argument is that Silver’s actions on racial tolerance as the commissioner of the NBA amount to propagating “white

hegemonic masculinity” (p.280) by “[drawing away] attention away from his power and authority as a man who occupies whiteness” (p. 279) in instances of advocacy for Black issues. Still, she maintains that Silver unlike Stern made efforts to communicate a partnership with players who occupy Black positionality rather than to speak on their behalf (Cramer, 2019, p. 280). Additionally, Silver has on repeated occasions professed the league as a platform for players to make comments on issues of importance to them (Gregory, 2019; Woods, 2019; Johnson et al., 2020, p. 6). This characteristic of the league under Silver has been consistently employed by NBA actors, with commentary emerging frequently about issues of race in America from some of its most prominent players such as LeBron James (pictured in Figure 2 with former teammate, Kyrie Irving).



Figure 2 LeBron James and Kyrie Irving wearing “I Can’t Breathe” t-shirts in December 2014, echoing the final words of Eric Garner who was killed by a police choke-hold earlier in 2014. (Marston, 2017, p. 55)

From: Dave McMenemy on Twitter [@mcten], Dec 8, 2014

The criticism of racial injustice in the United States from NBA actors is ongoing and emanates from NBA actors who occupy Black and white positionality alike. In the wake of the 2020 police killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd in the United States, many players and coaches are using their press appearances at the NBA Finals playoff tournament (a unique event to amend the 2019-2020 season after a stoppage in play caused by the COVID-19 pandemic) to deflect from the game of basketball and

advocate for the indictment and sentencing of their killers (McMenamin, 2020). And so, both prior-to and since Morey's tweet, the NBA has positioned itself as a league which permits and celebrates NBA actors to speak about issues of significance to them. However, while the league has not fired nor even penalized Morey for his tweet, unlike with discourse centered around racial issues in the United States there are instances where the NBA has actively prevented further commentary on the Hong Kong protests as these actions may be construed as a challenge to the rule of the Chinese government. And so, what about dealing with China when it comes to political rhetoric is different than other domestic and international instances of perceived social injustice? In the next section I explore the origins of the NBA's relationship with China to illuminate cultural and economic ideological discrepancies in a Sino-American context. And while I do not claim that these discrepancies amount to the undoing of NBA partnerships in China, these factors shed light on a relationship which could not flourish should these discrepancies emerge so viscerally into public discourse

The NBA in China

Here, I discuss the globalization efforts of the NBA to illuminate the circumstances in which the NBA had successfully (until recently) forayed into Chinese markets. In this context, the globalization efforts of the NBA will be described according to an articulation of the globalization of sport in an article by Huang (2013), in which he describes the globalization of sport as the space comprised by information flows and trade power relations, where distant actions may have significance in local contexts (p. 267). The article, which examines the diffusion of the NBA in China, describes globalization in this context as the linking of wider societal aspects to local political, economic, and cultural contexts (p. 267). Thus, when discussing the globalization efforts of the NBA, I am referring to the extent at which the NBA has become commodified in local contexts outside of the United States and Canada (pp. 271-275). I have mentioned Canada because the NBA has historically held two Canadian-based franchises, the Toronto Raptors and Vancouver Grizzlies (only the Raptors remain in Canada) (Huang & Hong, 2015, p. 1032). Therefore, Canadian contexts are of relevance when discussing the domestic operations of the NBA, albeit Canadian and American contexts will be distinguished when mentioned. However, the NBA will be assumed to operate according to American ideologies unless otherwise stated, as current commissioner Adam Silver

has referred to the NBA as an American company which holds “American values”, as the league is headquartered in the United States (Gregory, 2019).

Under the guidance of the NBA’s previous commissioner David Stern (whose tenure lasted from 1984-2014), the league’s global presence and financial value increased drastically (Cha & Lim, 2019, p 25). When Stern assumed the position as commissioner, the league had been marred with insolvency and allegedly held a reputation as a racial threat in American contexts due to association of deviance with Blackness in the 70s and 80s, especially in relation to its American-based professional sports counterparts (Andrews, 1999, p. 505). However, as the commissioner, Stern transformed the league into a multifaceted, multimedia entertainment corporation which came to boast international offices in “Paris, Geneva, London, Barcelona, Melbourne, Hong Kong, Mexico City, Taiwan, Tokyo and Toronto” with lucrative global broadcast agreements (Andrews, 1999, p. 505; Huang, 2013, p. 271). However, like many American and Western companies, the NBA desired but struggled to enter into Chinese markets once it opened itself to the world in the late 1970s and early 1980s; a highly coveted yet elusive commercial market of roughly 1.3 billion potential consumers (Andrews, 1999, p. 507; Huang, 2013, p. 276).

Initially, the NBA like other organizations struggled to foray into China. But with persistence and by making concessions atypical of the league’s previous successful efforts in global ventures such as offering its content to Chinese state television free of charge, Stern was able to manoeuvre successfully onto Chinese television and subsequently establish the league in China as a sought-after brand which has culminated in immense popularity in the nation. Next, I discuss the evolution of perceptions of sport in China as a communist nation who has come to embrace the NBA, a capitalist organization. I then detail the concessions made by Stern and the NBA to have gained their foothold in the country. In each portion of this section, Sino-American ideological discrepancies will be discussed to illuminate ideological incongruities, but with these observations I do not assert a conclusive analysis into why the NBA, or any Chinese entity has behaved as they have in the case study. Rather, I seek only to introduce these perspectives to existing literature about this case (e.g., Cha & Lim, 2019) to highlight how these ideological discrepancies may have exacerbated the response to Morey’s tweet. Furthermore, as the literature I am engaging with emanates predominantly from English language and Western contexts, this section (and essay)

largely excludes Chinese narratives and thus cannot claim to wholly illuminate the factors which caused the suspension of the NBA's partnerships in China.

China: basketball and sport

While basketball first emerged in China as a result of the missionary efforts of the YMCA in the late 19th and early 20th century, the circumstances of this introduction of the sport to the nation were not of capitalist aspirations, but rather of efforts towards cultural exchange and Christian proselytization (Larmer, 2005, pp. 5-10; Huang, 2013, p. 268). Basketball became and remained an immensely popular leisurely pastime through China's transition to Maoism (Huang, 2013; p 268). However, like all sport in China, basketball was not considered a means for personal glory, but rather a mechanism of unification and patriotism by promoting the health of its citizens via exercise and comradeship (Huang, 2013, p. 271; Larmer, 2005, p. xiv).

China's attitude towards sport as a means to showcase prowess and national glory emerged as the nation began to foray into Olympic competition; perhaps most pivotally at the 1980 games in Lake Placid after it had rejoined the International Olympic Committee following decades of abstention over international challenges to its jurisdictional legitimacy following the Chinese Civil War between what are now known as The People's Republic of China and Taiwan (Larmer, 2005, pp. 49; 257; Brownell, 2005; p. 1183). It is significant to note that they entered the games under "an agreement in which Taiwan was not allowed to use its national symbols or the name Republic of China nor to claim jurisdiction over all of mainland China" (Brownell, 2005; p. 1183), perhaps an admonition to Western entities that such behavior could be expected from China amidst sports diplomacy. It was around this time that the NBA began to make inroads with the country via instances goodwill cultural exchanges, where in 1979 the NBA sent its most recent league champions, the Washington Bullets, to play exhibition games against Chinese teams (Huang, 2013, p. 270). It was not a coincidence that this episode coincided with China's "opening-up" to the world as a potential economic trading partner under the then leader of the Chinese Communist Party, Deng Xiaoping; a period where many Western entities were infatuated by the opportunity to tap into China's vast market of potential consumers (Huang, 2013, pp. 271, 281; Cha & Lim, 2019, p. 24). These games were seen not only as a cultural exchange, but also helped forge a diplomatic avenue between the United States and the newly opened-up China; and in 1985 the

NBA invited the Chinese national basketball team to America for what was dubbed the “NBA-China Friendship Tour”, where the national team trained with some of the league’s most notable franchises (Huang, 2013, p. 271).

Beginning with its return to international competition in the 1980s, China is argued to have begun to fully embrace sport as a means to national glory and patriotism, as it sought to establish itself as a nation of competitive prowess that “commanded awe and admiration abroad and deep feelings of national pride at home” in the context of international athletic competition (Brownell, 2005; p. 1183; Larmer, 2005, p.49). However, as will be discussed next despite its alleged shift in perception of the value of sport, China would continue to prioritize national unity and hegemony above athletic achievements during its return to international sport; thus, illuminating that the Chinese government would rank nationalism above sustained involvement in transnational sports contexts. This later point highlights a discrepancy between China and the United States (and other capitalist-driven nations), who have traditionally viewed sport as a means showcase superiority in domestic and international contexts at both the levels of the team dynamic and individual athlete (Huang & Hong, 2015, p 1031).

The NBA and China

With Stern as commissioner, the league modeled itself after entertainment conglomerates like Disney rather than its American professional sport counterparts (Larmer, 2005, p. 108; Andrews, 1999, p. 506). And while the league’s aspirations were undoubtedly to increase its overall value, it did so by being “less concerned with generating significant revenue from broadcast fees than with ensuring the rapid and comprehensive spread of NBA television coverage around the globe” (Andrews, 1999, p. 507). And so, after securing their first international broadcasting agreement in Italy in the mid-1980s, under Stern the league proceeded to expand across Europe and into Asian markets like Japan and Hong Kong (Larmer, 2005, p. 108); and by procuring broadcast agreements, by the end of the 1990s the league was diffused by over 100 media companies in 199 countries, broadcasting in over 40 languages (Andrews, 1999, p. 507). The league’s vast and rapid expansion into foreign markets is argued to have been strengthened more by the marketing of its superstars than the game of basketball itself, and in doing so it was diffusing American culture via these figures (like former NBA superstars Larry Bird, Magic Johnson, and most notably in the Stern era: Michael

Jordan) as cultural commodities (Huang, 2013, pp. 271-272; Andrews, 1999, p. 507). While this essay will not dwell on the joint expansion of Nike, Michael Jordan and the NBA specifically, these three entities collectively enjoyed extraordinary growth from the 80s onward, which manifested most notably in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics where the NBA, its stars, and this marquee sportswear brand coalesced to showcase the epitome of American athletic hegemony and sports globalization (Huang, 2013, pp. 275-276; Huang & Hong, 2015, p. 1032).

As argued by Huang (2013) when discussing the league's focalization of its stars as cultural commodities to diffuse American culture into global markets, this diffusion was contingent not on supplanting local cultures, but the successful globalization of the league hinged on the compatibility this diffusion had in local contexts (pp. 267-268). In other words, while the NBA could reshape cultural responses to sport by their accommodating its diffusion in local contexts, the NBA would only be successful in its globalizing efforts when these local contexts were accommodated to by the NBA. It is therefore logical that the league was seeing rapid success in countries/regions like Italy, France, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Spain, Australia, Mexico, Canada, and even in Hong Kong and Taiwan, where similar ideologies pertaining to democratic political systems and free market capitalism purveyed. Therefore, despite China's opening-up to the world as a potential capital superpower in the late 70s and early 80s, the ideological political and economic incongruities between the United States and China would have suggested to Stern a challenge in the successful and sustained diffusion of the NBA into China according to its purveying social ideologies. And so, notwithstanding the history of basketball in China and the NBA's previous inroads and cultural exchanges with the country, navigating such a relationship would involve concessions in the forging of broadcast agreements, and via the immense popularity of China's own basketball superstar, Yao Ming.

In his book, *Operation Yao Ming: The Chinese Sports Empire, American Big Business, and the Making of an NBA Superstar* (2005), Brook Larmer details the hurdles faced by Stern in getting the NBA on Chinese televisions in an official capacity. Stern, after learning about the circulation of pirated tapes of NBA games circulating in China sought to legitimize that media avenue by offering re-runs of its games to the CCTV free of charge in 1987, despite the same content generating roughly \$10 million annually in markets like Japan and in Latin America (Larmer, 2005, pp. 109-110, 112; Andrews,

1999, p. 507; Li, 2012). Such a concession by a capitalist organization like the NBA was a strategic risk by Stern, but one that effectively satisfied an obvious appetite for NBA content in China. And while China was in the process of opening up to the world, it was notoriously doing so in much more rigid terms than Western entities were accustomed to, as China likely knew it could leverage its attractive market to maintain authority over its domestic social ideologies (Cha & Lim, 2019). But as Andrews (1999) argues, “China represents the most pronounced example of the NBA's marketing strategy and its predilection for making short-term sacrifices in an attempt to ensure long-term gain” (p. 507).

Not long after the NBA had its games aired legitimately on state-run Chinese television stations, CCTV-5 (China's first sports-only broadcast channel) was forged and signed a long-term deal with the NBA to its games in China (Huang, 2013, p. 274). The year prior, CCTV had broadcasted its first live NBA games (which were the 1994 NBA finals between the New York Knicks and Houston Rockets) to immense popularity, and thus the CCTV appeared to have identified a viable homegrown market for NBA basketball (Huang, 2019, p. 274; Larmer, 2005, pp. 113-114). Yet while viewership of the NBA steadily increased in subsequent years, viewership skyrocketed once Yao Ming began his NBA career with the Houston Rockets in 2002, which resulted in basketball becoming the most popular sport among Chinese youth (Cha & Lim, 2019, p. 25).

Yao is a unique basketball figure not only for being the first Chinese NBA superstar, but also in how he came to join the NBA at all. The first Chinese-born NBA player was not Yao, but Wang Zhizhi who played for numerous teams in the league from 2001-2005 (Larmer, 2005, 179-193). In this essay, I will not analyse Wang's tumultuous career in the NBA other than to say he is alleged to have succumbed to the pursuit of personal glory as an NBA player seeking to find increased success in the league while neglecting his duties as a member of the Chinese nation team and Chinese military (Larmer, 2005, 217-227). This infamous episode in China's affiliation with the NBA is alleged to have made the Chinese government cautious of allowing Yao to transfer from the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) to NBA and risk Yao breaching his obligations to China as Wang had. Such a dynamic made for an excruciating ordeal as far as the NBA was concerned, as Yao unlike Wang was projected to be a superstar at the NBA level; a factor the NBA understood as massively valuable for the league's viewership and popularity in China. The league had grown into a massive entertainment

organization off the strength of marketing its superstars abroad, and now it had the potential to promote one from its most coveted foreign market. According to Larmer (2005), the NBA made serious gestures to the Chinese government that it would enforce all agreement and caveats from the Chinese government to ensure Yao stay loyal to his country and not himself succumb to the pursuit of personal glory provided by living in the United States that Wang was alleged to have done. As such, the NBA was treating the introduction of Yao into the league in a way that it had not ever had to do with both domestic talent, and players transferring from international professional basketball leagues (Larmer, 2005, pp. 228-243). Yao's loyalty to his country never waived, and as will be discussed in section 1.5 he is now the head of the CBA.

His significance to the NBA and its relations in China has been and remains incredibly significant. In 2008 after Yao had become a global basketball sensation as a gifted and towering athlete, a group called "NBA China" was formed; whose purpose was to strengthen the NBA's presences in China, and in just over ten years, the organizations success in doing so has raised its valuation from \$2 to \$4 billion US (Cha & Lim, 2019, p.25). It was unlikely the timing of this was coincidental to the fact that Beijing was set to host the Olympic summer games where basketball (featuring NBA players such as Ming and James) would be a marquee event, with Stern professing about NBA China and the significance of the Olympics in Beijing that "the opportunity for basketball and the NBA in China is simply extraordinary" (*NBA Finds Local Partners (And ESPN) For NBA China*, 2008). By this point, the league had procured over 30 different media partnerships in the country, and after Stern's departure in 2014, the NBA under Silver forged a partnership with the Chinese media conglomerate Tencent for the exclusive streaming rights to NBA games in China, which was renewed at a valuation of \$1.5 billion US in July of 2019 (just months before the Morey debacle) (Cha & Lim, 2019, p. 25).

And so, despite the initial concessions made by Stern in getting NBA games onto Chinese television and the unique and challenging circumstances of getting Yao to the NBA from 2002-2011, the NBA efforts to expand into China were successful until Morey's tweet and the subsequent fallout. However, these factors illuminate ideological incongruities which may have been exposed or exacerbated by commentary on the pro-democracy Hong Kong Protest movement.

Hong Kong and the Chinese state

In February of 2019, amendments to an extradition law in Hong Kong were drafted which would facilitate the extradition of Hong Kong residents to mainland China (“Timeline”, 2020). This law sparked protests which began in March of 2019, where protestors decried that these amendments challenged and infringed upon Hong Kong’s high level of independence afforded to it following the its handover to China from the UK in 1997 (“Timeline,” 2020; Hartley & Jarvis, 2020, pp. 409-10). These protests continued to swell, and evolved into what has been dubbed “the pro-democracy protest movement,” which not only challenged these amendments, but which also railed against an intensifying perception that the Chinese government was expansively infringing upon Hong Kong’s relative political and economy autonomy from mainland China (“Timeline,” 2020). In this section, I detail an abridged overview of tensions in the Hong Kong region to provide context regarding the sensitivity of pledging allegiance to a faction implicated in these ongoing protests, such as Morey is understood to have done (siding with the protest movement by way of his tweet). I note here that when discussing ‘China’, I refer to mainland Chinese entities (state and private) which engage in transnational economic trading, as the NBA’s relationship to China is predicated upon such economic activity. By this logic, discussions of China may also constitute the mainland Chinese markets in which these entities may be engaged in economic trading. Furthermore, as there are ongoing debates regarding the jurisdictional reach of the Chinese government discussed in this essay, (Cha & Lim, 2019, p. 31; Brownell, 2005, p. 1183; Hartley & Jarvis, 2020, p. 411), I therefore distinguish between The People’s Republic of China (or China), the Chinese government, and Hong Kong, for the sake of unambiguity.

Tensions pertaining to the laws and jurisdiction over Hong Kong have long been prevalent and contemporarily stem from the municipality’s handover from Britain to China, where on July 1, 1997, the sovereignty of the metropolitan area of Hong Kong was transferred from being a colony of the British Empire to becoming a “Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China (Fong & Lui, 2017). This was a polarizing event commonly known as “the handover”, as there were those who feared the socialist system of China would not be able to accommodate the free-market capitalist system of Hong Kong, and that “highly liberalized Hong Kong would ... be a source of conflict and contention ... [where] personal freedom would be contained”

(Fong & Lui, 2017, p. xvii). The result of the handover was the establishment of what is known as “one country, two systems”; a political and economic system to be upheld by the principles of the “Basic Law” designed to preserve a large degree of Hong Kong’s autonomy for 50 years, giving the region the relative authority in setting its domestic policies including the extradition of its citizens (Hartley & Jarvis, 2020, p. 409).

In a book edited by Brian C.H. Fong and Tai-Lok Lui titled: *Hong Kong 20 years after the handover: emerging social and institutional fractures after 1997* (2017), Fong and Lui detail the decolonizing Hong Kong from Britain, arguing the impacts of decolonizing its institutional structures were underestimated at the time, and that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (the governing body implemented by the Chinese state to oversee the region) was found to be “incapable of carrying out effective governance” (pp. xvii-xviii). The factors they outline as indicating ineffective governance by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government (HKSAR) amount to challenges to the democratization of Hong Kong within the “one country, two systems” dynamic; where Hong Kong citizens would contest the jurisdictional reach of the Chinese government, and the Chinese government would implement actions designed to uphold its jurisdiction over Hong Kong by prioritizing policies which [ensured] both the interests of Hong Kong and those of China (Poon, 2017, p. 11).

Challenges to the democratization of Hong Kong within the framework of “one country, two systems” manifest when the socialist political culture of China is confronted by social mobilization which initiates a risk to the Chinese government’s control of the region (such as the pro-democracy Hong Kong protests) (Poon, 2017, p. 10). In a chapter from *Hong Kong 20 years after the handover: emerging social and institutional fractures after 1997* (2017), author Kit Poon argues that “to eliminate the risk of losing control over the territory, [the Chinese Government] prefers to err on the safe side by tightening the strings to reform” (p. 10). Poon points to an example of social mobilization in Hong Kong which predates the pro-democracy protests, where in 2013 the Chinese government instituted constitutional reforms in Hong Kong to be able to veto the results of general elections in the region to prevent the appointments of political leaders in favour of leaders they trusted (p. 11). As a result of actions such as these, in 2013 and into 2014 social unrest and social movements manifested in the region, where student-lead protests shut down major commercial districts for 79 days in the summer of 2014

(pp. 10-14). During this period, tear-gas was discharged on the protestors by police and security forces, bricks were thrown at police and security forces, and business operations and the lives of ordinary residents were hindered (p. 13).

In 2019, this type of visceral and violent social unrest manifested and escalated to the point that the pro-democracy protests became fixtures of international news cycles, where the appeals of both the protestors and pro-Beijing factions were being transmitted to the international spectators (Hartley & Jarvis, 2020, p. 409; “Timeline,” 2020). And so, it should perhaps have not been surprising given the level of tension and highly politicized status of this contentious episode that Chinese entities (both at the state and private levels) would react decisively to rhetoric that challenged its anti-protest posture in Hong Kong such as Morey’s tweet. Furthermore, as the NBA who has held a significant and growing economic foothold in Chinese markets for three decades, it was within the power of these Chinese entities to effectively retaliate to Morey’s tweet by suspending all economic ties the NBA had in China.

Daryl Morey’s tweet: responses and debates

In this section, I broadly examine the discourse surrounding Morey’s tweet, as well as the larger implications his tweet has roused such as debates about the ethics of dealing in China considering its reputation for human rights abuses. Here, I highlight posts which critique organizations deemed to be kowtowing to the Chinese government by looking to a study by Marta Dynel and Fabio Indio Massimo Poppi (2020); where the authors have collected data from the social media platform Reddit which advocate for the boycott of companies which have kowtowed to the Chinese government’s in the context of the pro-democracy Hong Kong protest movement. Like Dynel and Poppi (2020), I discuss political activism as disseminated through media platforms with pertinence to this case. However, the Dynel and Poppi (2020) article incorporates the NBA and its actors into its study along with: Activision Blizzard, Apple, [the NBA] together with its player LeBron James, [and] Nike, all pertaining to posts on Reddit (p. 6), whereas I primarily focalize the NBA and will not limit my analysis to commentary which emanates from a singular platform, social media or otherwise. As such, my data collection of media sources uses news articles and social media posts to quote and address relevant commentary. Furthermore, I use these news articles and posts to pinpoint dates of significance when discernible to establish decisive instances, such as

the commentary on, and exercising of, the authority by powerful actors (government entities, private organizations, and media and NBA actors) (e.g., Coleman, 2019; Huang & Leng, 2019; Kirby, 2020; Perper, 2020; Reynolds, 2019; Kasabian, 2019; Scott, 2019; Wimbish, 2019; Eppers, 2019). From the Dynel and Poppi (2020) article, I have also included figures as well as the descriptions of these figures when relevant for additional context.

The actors analyzed in this section are former and current NBA players; NBA executives; the NBA's current commissioner; professional basketball analysts and media personalities; Chinese business leaders with professional affiliation to the NBA; and NBA fans both domestic and international. The media platforms alluded to are in the form of traditional media organizations (e.g., China Central Television; the New York Times), and social media organizations (e.g., Twitter; Weibo). A distinction between these is significant, as the process of publishing or broadcasting content is different between them. Regarding media organizations, there is often an internal review process required before content is published. However, with social media (depending who publishes the content), content may be disseminated without any review process. Regarding figures of public notoriety such as NBA players and other NBA actors, these individuals via social media can have their perspectives amplified via their notoriety and the ubiquity of social media platforms such as Twitter (Johnson et al., 2020, pp.4, 6, 14). Due to these factors, their perspectives can then be rapidly engaged with and circulated (shared, re-posted, re-tweeted, etc.) by other social media users, from which traditional media organizations further disseminate, analyse and discuss this content (pp. 1, 14)

In this section, I like Cha and Lim (2019) discuss Turkish-born NBA player Enes Kanter and his outspokenness about the Turkish government (p. 34); I address this case to illuminate how the NBA has reacted differently to an instance of an NBA actor criticizing the actions of a foreign government. Additionally, I look more closely at Morey as a figure, investigating his possible motives for publishing the tweet and previous history of activism (if any). When discussing Morey specifically, I include a discussion of social movements according to Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani (2006), and Christian Lahusen (2009). While this literature describes various fundamental aspects of social movements, they do not specifically address the case study in question. As such, my analysis of how Morey may have become emboldened to profess sympathy for the pro-Democracy Hong Kong protest movements will be coalesced with my discussion of

the ongoing protest movement in Hong Kong, as well as the literature which investigates the case study specifically. Yet, while I will look to the social movement theory literature of della Porta and Diani (2006) and Lahusen (2009), I do not claim that what they describe in their literature as the exact circumstances that led Morey to circulate this graphic. Rather, I provide insight as to how social movements garner attention and sympathy peripheral to the movement as strategies to challenge incumbents by garnering increasing support and legitimacy.

Responses internal and external to the NBA

Lebron James was not the only NBA superstar of immense popularity in China to remark on Morey's tweet: "This situation has a huge weight and gravity to it and so many things that need to be sorted out, but I just don't know enough about Chinese history and how that's influenced modern society enough to speak on it" stated Stephen Curry of the Golden State Warriors on October 9th (Kasabian, 2019). Curry is the marquee player on the Warriors, who as of 2019 was the most popular NBA team in China (Tan, 2019); "We appreciate them as a fanbase, and we love everything they're about. We appreciate the support they give us individually, and as an organization" said James Harden of the Houston Rockets about China and Chinese NBA fans on October, 7, before adding on October 13 that "I'm staying out of it [Hong Kong]" (Wimbish, 2019; Eppers, 2019, as cited in Cha & Lim, 2019, p. 33). Harden's comments bear significance as he's the marquee player of the Morey's Rockets, who are the team which drafted China's first ever NBA superstar, the aforementioned Yao Ming, and who regularly played exhibition games in China and until recently held many lucrative Chinese sponsorships (Cha & Lim, 2019, p. 30; Huang, 2013, p. 279; Larmer, 2005).

These NBA superstars frequent China annually as a part of NBA China initiatives, and each serve as cultural commodities by the NBA to strengthen their business interests in China via the notoriety and marketability of its superstars (Cha & Lim, 2019, p. 34; Huang, 2013, p. 272). As such, it is perhaps unremarkable that each abstained from outrightly condoning Morey's right to freedom of expression by each in some way commenting on the significance of the NBA's operations in China, possibly due to the league's increasing profitability by establishing a presence there. To explain, over roughly the past decade because of the success of the NBA's growth into international markets, namely into China where in 2018-19 as many as 600 million

Chinese people watched an NBA game on TV or streaming (Cha & Lim, 2019, p.25), the league has enjoyed an added a valuation of \$133 million per NBA team owner's franchise as of 2019 as a result of efforts to make the NBA ubiquitous internationally (p. 25).

The significance of this relationship was expressed by Houston Rockets owner Tilman Fertitta following Morey's tweet, who on October 5th stated via Twitter that "[Morey] does NOT speak for the [Houston Rockets] ... we are NOT a political organization" (Perper, 2019). Despite this statement, and that Morey deleted the tweet shortly after it was published, the Houston Rockets have lost an estimated \$25 million dollars in revenue for the 2019-20 season as a direct result of the tweet with it's merchandise being removed from NBA-China internet stores, and all of it's games removed from Chinese television (Cha & Lim, 2019, pp. 23, 25). However, there soon began circulation of political cartoons, graphics and memes which took aim at the league and at LeBron James specifically (see Figures 3 and 4) for being outspoken about human rights abuses in America regarding police brutality and the societal oppression of Black people, but refusing to take a similar stance on infamous allegations of human rights abuses in China (Dynel & Poppi, 2020, p. 9; Scott, 2019; Huang & Leng, 2019).

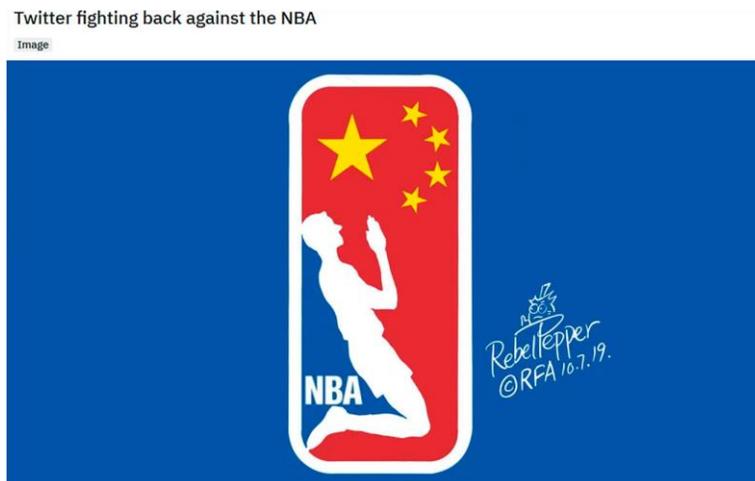


Figure 3 Manipulated version of the NBA logo posted on Twitter by Chinese graphic artist, Rebel Pepper (psudonym), showing the anonymous figure of the NBA logo bowing to the National Flag of the People's Republic of China.

From: Dynel & Poppi, 2020, p.8.

LeBron James educating protesters.

Meme



Truth

Image

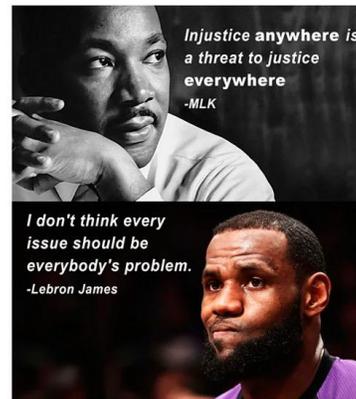


Figure 4 Left: cartoon by Gary Varvel depicting LeBron James in Chinese military regalia; Right: two incongruous pictures of Martin Luther King, Jr and James with verbatim quotes.

From: Dynel & Poppi, 2020, p. 9

In Figure 3, a graphic created by the Chinese graphic artist, Rebel Pepper depicts a manipulated version of the NBA logo, where “in lieu of a dribbling basketball player, there is a player kneeling and religiously paying his homage to the Chinese flag ... [a] deprecating metaphorical representation of the NBA’s subordination [to the Chinese government]” (Dynel & Poppi, 2020, p. 9). In Figure 4, James is directly targeted as a figure who is a patsy for the Chinese government and hypocritical as an advocate for social justice. The image on the left of Figure 4 is a political cartoon by Gary Varvel which depicts an incident from 1989 in Beijing, where mostly students were protesting for political reform in China; protests which were violently quashed by the Chinese military in an episode of martial law in the country (Dynel & Poppi, 2020, p. 9). The man holding bags in this picture has been famously dubbed as ‘Tank Man’, who became an emblem of the peaceful protests in Beijing’s Tiananmen Square before the military encroached the demonstrations with tanks (p. 9). Here, Varvel has drawn James wearing Chinese military regalia “educating” ‘Tank Man’ in a speech reminiscent of his public statement about Morey’s tweet (p. 9). In the image on the right of Figure 4, a quote from James is juxtaposed with one by the civil rights activist icon, Martin Luther King, Jr, highlighting how James’ (a professed advocate for social justice in America) statement demonstrates a lack of concern for issues that do not affect him directly (p 10). LeBron James for his statements about Morey became a direct target by advocates for the pro-democracy protestors, and in Hong Kong, people began publicly burning James’s jerseys, with claims emanating from the protest movement which echoed the

notion that James was being selective in his outspoken activism for human rights (Scott, 2019).

Morey's tweet was specifically focused on the plight of Pro-Democracy Hong Kong protestors, a movement initially instigated in response to an extradition bill between Hong Kong and mainland China which festered into a movement advocating for civil liberties more generally under a perceived intensifying of Chinese-state oppression in Hong Kong (Cha & Kim, 2019, p 23; Dynel & Poppi, 2020, p. 2). However, the negative response to the NBA's reactionary actions stemming from the incident seemed to be conflating the ethos of the protest movement and alleged human rights abuses by the Chinese government more generally (e.g., the Tiananmen Square massacre, and mass detention of Uighurs), thus fostering a debate as to whether the NBA ought to be engaged in business in China at all.

To date, there are no instances of players or other NBA actors brandishing or promoting any slogan targeting the Chinese government explicitly, and so it appears the league is handling this episode previously than others involving the criticism of foreign governments. And as the league begins to resume its season in the summer of 2020 while incorporating various social justice elements into this resumption such as permitting players to wear activist slogans on their uniforms rather than their names, there are reports that the league has excluded any mention of Hong Kong or China as a part of these efforts. However, that is not to say there has not been support for Morey from NBA actors, both currently and formerly active. Retired NBA legend Shaquille O'Neal and current NBA commentator for the American television network TNT commented on the matter in late-October 2019:

As American people, we do a lot of business in China, and they know and understand our values, and we understand their values. ... And one of our best values here in America is free speech. We're allowed to say what we want to say, and we're allowed to speak up about injustices, and that's just how it goes. And if people don't understand that, that's something they have to deal with. ... [the situation is] unfortunate for both parties, [but] Daryl Morey was right (Yeung, 2019)

Also, a current NBA player also professed sympathy for protestors in Hong Kong and their sympathizers abroad. NBA all-star, Kyrie Irving, of the Brooklyn Nets who is the former teammate of LeBron James (pictured with James in Figure 2) commented on pro-

democracy Hong Kong sympathizers who demonstrated at a Nets game on October 19th, 2019, stating:

When you think about communities across the world, I think that a lot of people would stand for world peace. When government gets involved, it impacts different communities in different ways. And the reality is that, as individuals it's our job to stand up for what we believe in. Now, I understand Hong Kong and China are dealing with their issues, respectively, but there's enough oppression ... going on in America for me not to be involved between issues there as well. ... Coloured people here in America, we're still fighting everyday freedom. And so, when I think about Hong Kong and China, the people are in uproar, and for us as Americans to comment on that, African Americans or American Indians to comment on that, you're connected nonetheless, especially when it impacts freedoms or world peace. So, for me as an individual, ... I can understand why protestors come to the games. (Pearce, 2019)

What comments like Irving's and O'Neal's demonstrate is that there were those in the NBA willing to advocate for the American value of freedom of expression, as well as for the plight of the Hong Kong protest movement. However, as the NBA had already had its partnerships suspended by the time of these comments, (and perhaps because O'Neal is not technically a current NBA actor but retired one), these comments likely did not appear to further the wrath of Chinese entities who had already beset upon the NBA significant financial damage.

Yet while considering that despite the NBA ultimately standing behind Morey's tweet and bearing the financial losses of the Chinese government and Chinese businesses cutting ties with all NBA entities, there have been no notable comments made by NBA actors regarding the matter since October of 2019. Furthermore, since the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, the league announced it would be permitting players to wear activist/political slogans on their jerseys once their season resumes in August 2020, but would allegedly not endorse any slogan which discusses Hong Kong or China (Bieler, 2020). And so, what makes dealing with the Chinese government different? While statements which abstain in being critical of alleged human rights abuses in China may be due to the ignorance of NBA actors to the domestic affairs of China, it appears foremost that the NBA wishes for this relationship to mend according to its swift distancing from Morey's tweet. For while discussions of human rights issues domestically (such as those which align with the Black Lives Matter movement) and internationally (such as Kanter's criticism of the Turkish government)

continue into the Summer of 2020 (McMenamin, 2020; Zidan, 2020), there are at the same time reports about the NBA continuing to censor any commentary on Hong Kong. As Silver has alluded to in an interview regarding the matter that the league will “wait and see what happens” (Gregory, 2019), it appears as though by staying mum on Hong Kong unlike other political issues the league may be able to regain their foothold in China.

Response and reaction from within China and from Chinese government officials

The backlash to Morey’s tweet from both Chinese state and business actors was swift, and culminated in not only the Houston Rockets bearing a significant financial loss in retaliation from Chinese entities, but as did the entire NBA. On October 6th, the Chinese Basketball Association (CBA) severed all ties with the Houston Rockets, a decision which came from the president of the CBA, Yao Ming (who had himself played for the Rockets from 2002 to 2011), said in an official statement that the CBA “strongly disagrees with the improper remarks by [Rockets GM] Daryl Morey, and has decided to suspend exchanges and cooperation with the team” (Cha & Lim, p. 30; Perper, 2019; Huang & Leng, 2019).

The connection between Yao and the Rockets in these circumstances may seem emblematic, but neither the Rockets’ GM, Morey (who builds the team’s roster of players and coaching staff) nor its current owner were affiliated with the team when Yao played for them. However, due to Yao’s incredible notoriety in China both prior to and during his stint in the NBA as a basketball superstar, the Rockets became significant in forging the relationship between China and the NBA; who until this suspension featured regularly in NBA-China campaigns which involved exhibition games played between NBA and CBA teams (Larmer, 2005, p. 320-22; Huang, 2013, p. 276). Thus, losing a relationship with China’s premier basketball league, one which boasts similar viewership numbers to the NBA, and which has many ex-NBA players on its rosters (Huang, 2013, p. 29), was a significant loss not only to the Rockets’ overall profits, but to their reputation in China as well.

Chinese media personalities began to comment on Morey’s tweet, with one of China’s most prominent basketball analysts, Yang Yi, expressing via the popular Chinese social media platform Weibo, that “although the West advocates complete

freedom of speech, without basic understanding of major social and political issues, I do not think they should have the freedom to make such statements” (Huang & Leng, 2019). He continued by stating:

The institutions they serve have long been the beneficiaries of Chinese social stability and trade freedom. The Rockets have received a lot of Chinese sponsorship in the past 17 years. [US sports broadcaster] ESPN has also made tens of millions of dollars annually in China over the past four years. China should make these institutions pay for [Morey’s message]. (Huang & Leng, 2019).

It is observable that economic retribution would be a viable retaliatory act by Chinese businesses with ties to the NBA, and justifications of Morey’s tweet according to the American value of freedom of expression may not negate what Chinese actors perceived to be an unforgivable act of commenting on Chinese affairs. Yang’s post was widely circulated and celebrated by Chinese NBA fans on Weibo, with many calling for Morey’s firing while echoing condemnation of any professed support for the pro-democracy Hong Kong protest movement (Huang & Leng, 2019).

The perceived severity of Morey’s action was reiterated and elaborated upon by the Chinese Consulate General in Houston, one of six such Chinese diplomatic missions in the United States (Wong et al., 2020), who on October 6, 2019 published a statement through its official website, which read:

We are deeply shocked by the erroneous comments on Hong Kong made by Mr. Daryl Morey, general manager of the Houston Rockets. We have lodged representations and expressed strong dissatisfaction with the Houston Rockets, and urged the latter to correct the error and take immediate concrete measures to eliminate the adverse impact. At the moment, ending violence and chaos and restoring order has become the widest common consensus and the strongest appeal of all social sectors in Hong Kong. Anybody with conscience would support the efforts made by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to safeguard Hong Kong’s social stability. (*Chinese Consulate General Spokesperson’s Remarks on the Erroneous Comments on Hong Kong by General Manager of the Houston Rockets*, 2019)

It is worth noting here that the reference to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in this statement semantically alludes to the Chinese Government’s jurisdiction over Hong Kong as per the 1997 handover of Hong Kong from the UK to China (Hartley & Jarvis, 2020, p 409). As mentioned earlier, the HKSAR is a branch of the Chinese government designated to oversee China’s “Basic Law” where the city of “Hong Kong’s

distinctive political system, common law tradition, and institutional structures would be preserved for a period of 50 years (2047), giving Hong Kong relative discretion in setting domestic policies” (p. 409). Such a statement from the Chinese Consulate General in Houston can then be understood to support the Chinese government branch (HKSAR) which drafted the amendments to Hong Kong’s extraditions laws. As such, the stance of the Chinese Consulate General in Houston vehemently defends the actions of the HKSAR and its police and security forces who are engaged in at times violent clashes with protestors; protestors professed to be demonstrating as a challenge to the HKSAR’s actions in what members of the protest movement argue infringe upon Hong Kong’s autonomy and independence from the Chinese government according to the principles of “one country, two systems” (Hartley & Jarvis, 2020, pp. 409-10). The comments by Yang and the Chinese Consulate General in Houston therefore illuminate that rhetoric which condones the plight of pro-democracy protestors in Hong Kong amounts to a challenge to the Chinese government, and that retribution ought to be economically significant.

In what Cha and Lim (2019) argue as an effort by the Chinese government to stifle any further statements from NBA actors which pertained to the pro-democracy Hong Kong protests, China’s state-run media station China Central Television (CCTV) as well as Chinese media conglomerate Tencent, announced on October 6th that they would immediately halt all the broadcasting of NBA games (p. 30). The actions of the CCTV (who exclusively broadcasted NBA games on Chinese television), and of Tencent (who had recently signed a deal with the NBA to exclusively stream all NBA games online in China) would have instant financial ramifications for the NBA, who were in the midst of hosting a number of events in China at the time which were all cancelled (p. 30). As stated by the Chinese-state newspaper, *Global Times*, “Freedom of speech is never free. The [NBA] incident with China might help the Western world to at least pay attention to what and how Chinese ordinary people, including basketball fans, feel about #HK riots and why they are offended” (Global Times, 2019).

It should be noted that “Daryl Morey immediately deleted the tweet, the Rockets announced that Morey’s initial post did not represent the views of the team, the NBA Commissioner expressed regret over the incident, and some of the NBA’s star players disavowed any interest in the protests in Hong Kong” (Cha & Lim, 2019, p. 24). However, it seemed that the only suitable response by the NBA from the perspective of

the Chinese government would be to eliminate Morey's affiliation with the league by firing him (Gregory, 2019; Cha & Lim, 2019, p 23); to which if the NBA did, they would be punishing an American citizen for making a statement via his personal Twitter account. On October 8th, the NBA admonished Morey via a statement from commissioner Silver, but by then the NBA had already had its Chinese broadcasting relationships suspended.

Enes Kanter and the Turkish government

The examples I have outlined thus far pertain to commentary on domestic instances of perceived injustices condoned by the NBA, whereas Morey's post has been construed as commentary on a foreign government. And so, I will outline a recent instance in which the NBA has not only condoned statements made by an NBA actor critical of a foreign government, but has also taken actions to penalize entities critical of that actor by suspending ties with those entities; which appears to contrast with how the NBA is dealing with the Chinese entities who are condemning Morey.

Considering that just a few years earlier the league had made strides in establishing itself as progressive on human rights issues for removing an owner for making racist remarks about Black people, and permitting its players to brandish slogans which aligned with the Black Lives Matter movement in pre-game warmups (see Figure 4) (Cramer, 2019, p. 12; Cha & Lim, 2019, p. 31), it is curious that the league and its organizations would forcefully silence rhetoric aimed at critiquing perceived social justice issues regardless of their locale. There exists a recent incident in which a precedent for the league's condoning of political statements which criticize foreign affairs has been set via the case of NBA player Enes Kanter, exemplifying that the league does not limit its actors to criticizing perceived injustices to domestic contexts.

To explain, Turkish-born player of the Boston Celtics, Enes Kanter, has been outspoken against what he perceives to be atrocities by the Turkish government against its citizens, actions which have been condemned in Turkey much like Morey's tweet has been in China (Kanter's passport has been revoked by the Turkish government and he has been accused by that government of having ties to terrorist groups) (Cha & Lim, 2019, p.34; Kirby, 2019). As stated by Silver about Kanter skipping a trip to London (where the NBA was holding games) over security fears due to his outspokenness aimed at the Turkish government: "I support Enes as a player in this league, and I

support the platform that our players have to speak out on issues [important to them]" (Woods, 2019).

Most notably in relation to this case study, the league has not distanced itself from Kanter's comments, and in fact successfully advocated for his earning of American citizenship (Kirby, 2019). Furthermore, they took decisive action against the Turkish company which ran the NBA's Turkish Twitter account by cutting ties with them for their omission of Kanter's statistics from reports on his team's games (Kirby, 2019; Reynolds; 2019). As such, it is apparent that while the NBA wishes not to further dissolve its relationships in China, that dealing with Turkish organizations critical of Kanter exercising freedom of expression in the United States is of a different standard. Yet while it can be construed that the NBA is not kowtowing to the Chinese government for admonishing Morey, it appears that the league remains beholden to China in that the league will be able to regain its foothold in Chinese markets by apologizing frequently, removing statements critical of China's actions in Hong Kong, and taking actions to prevent further condemnation of the Chinese government at NBA events.

But is Morey commenting on the pro-democracy Hong Kong protest movement the same as Kanter speaking out against the Turkish government? After all, Kanter has been affected far more directly by the actions of a government than Morey considering his father was only recently released from prison after 7 years in detention on charges linking him to terrorism (from which he was acquitted) (Zidan, 2020). Furthermore, regarding LeBron James and other Black NBA players who advocate for or engage in advocacy against systemic racism in the United States and Canada, these players are commenting on issues which they have experienced just by existing in these contexts. And so, what are Morey's links to the pro-democracy Hong Kong protest movement? As he has admitted fault apologized for publishing his tweet while both Kanter and James remain steadfast in their criticisms, could this be a factor as to why the NBA has been silencing further criticism or commentary which pertains to the Hong Kong protests. Next, I discuss Morey's presence on social media and as a public figure to propound if his case warrants the response it has received.

Daryl Morey: an activist?

To contextualize the function of Morey's sharing of the Stand With Hong Kong graphic, I look to literature which describes the efficacy of the circulation of content on

social media in instances of collective activism and social movements in local and transnational contexts (Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2016), and which also discuss NBA actor activism (Dyner & Poppi, 2020; Cramer, 2019). In the context of social movements and collective activism, Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán, (2016) discuss the circulation of content (such as graphics like what was shared by Morey) as minimal units of cultural information transferred between individuals which are replicated when powerful (p. 211). Furthermore, in the context of social movements or otherwise, these units of cultural information can serve as the identification of a social and/or political movement (p. 211), such as the case with Morey's post which shared the logo and slogan of the pro-democracy Hong Kong activist group Stand With Hong Kong (Perper, 2019). Ultimately, commentary which criticized Morey's tweet was not limited to Chinese actors, and debates began to culminate publicly about which topics pertaining to social justice were deemed acceptable to discuss by NBA actors and which were not

In the context of activist efforts both domestically and transnationally, the circulation of content can constitute action by the social media user who promotes that content (Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2016, p. 22). This is significant because an action such as Morey's has caused some to treat or chastise him as an active sympathizer of a polarizing social justice issue, despite it occurring in Hong Kong and Morey being situated in the United States. In doing so, like James and Kanter, Morey appeared to be pledging allegiance to a singular perspective on a social justice issue. Here, I describe Morey's act of activism according to social movement literature (e.g., della Porta & Diani, 2006; Lahusen, 2009) to outline how people with no overt affiliation to a perceived social justice issue can become mobilized to profess sympathy for a social movement. I then analyse these factors against the NBA's official statements regarding how the league is professed to provide a platform for NBA actors to make statements about issues of significance to them.

Prior to and since his infamous tweet, Daryl Morey appears to be a reasonably active Twitter user, making posts roughly 2.5 times a day since he joined the platform in September of 2008 (his joining of the platform seems to coincide with his inaugural season as GM of the Rockets). (<https://twitter.com/dmorey>; *Daryl Morey*, n.d.). I should mention that I have done no systemic analysis of his Twitter feed, and as such have no solid measurement as to the ratio at which his tweets are politically motivated. Suffice it to say, a brief inspection of his tweets from July 10-24, 2020 shows a combination of

posts which are his personal commentary, political commentary on topic issues (such as the ongoing civil unrest in the United States regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and protest movements), and the sharing and recirculation of pre-existing content (re-tweeting) (<https://twitter.com/dmorey>). As such, Morey appears to be unremarkable in how he behaves on Twitter. Regarding his personal conduct, he again seems an unremarkable individual other than his notoriety as a successful and influential GM in the NBA. In other words, apart from in the context of this case study Morey has not been branded a polarizing figure.

As mentioned earlier, Morey has and continues to publish content which is political, whether the content is original or a recirculation of already published political commentary such as graphics, memes, articles, etc. However, this does not necessarily make him a unique actor on Twitter as far as the NBA is concerned, for as mentioned earlier it is endorsed by the league to comment on and promote issues of significance to users during periods of social unrest (Cramer, 2019). Furthermore, I have found no discernible literature which professes Morey as a polarizing or politically active figure other than that which mentions his involvement in the case study in question, which is in contrast to both James and Kanter, who continue to be endorsed by the NBA for their roles in advocating for human rights issues (e.g., Cha & Lim, 2019; Cramer, 2019; Kirby, 2019; Laird, 2014; Marston, 2017). But unlike with Kanter and James, Morey (while also speaking about issues in the United States), has professed support for a social movement of which he has no ethnic or national connection. Why then did Morey feel emboldened to publish the Stand With Hong Kong group's graphic?

In their book *Social Movements: an introduction* (2006), Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani describe how in a globalized world, individuals' social actions can become influenced by actions which occur in distant places (p. 51); for because of the transnational relationships and connections forged by economic globalization, transnational cultural diffusion is also made possible (p. 52). As such, those engaged with mechanisms which diffuse culture transnationally (such as traditional media and social media) may generate opinions and perceptions of foreign customs and existence, which can then lead to the materialization of foreign ideals and issues into local interests (pp. 2, 52). It is therefore upon this logic that social movements can exploit these transitional avenues of cultural diffusion to mobilize support globally in what Lahusen (2009) describes as transnational activism (p. 195).

Lahusen (2009) illustrates that these efforts emerge out of “international campaigns” by social movements, where these movements at local levels strive to publicize their plight and objectives through media [and social media] channels to garner global sympathy and support in various countries to help exert pressure on local governments (pp. 189, 196, 199). This has certainly been the case with the pro-democracy Hong Kong protestors, who embody a movement with no central leadership, but which communicates its plight via media messaging (Dynel & Poppi, 2020, p. 2; Hartley & Jarvis, 2020, pp 404, 406, 415). In fact, because of the speed at which information can be now be shared between extensive communities makes this a valuable form of political action by social movements (Piñeiro-Otero & Martínez-Rolán, 2016, p. 18). However, it is ultimately to the media organizations of a particular locale which decides what is covered and how it is covered (Lahusen, 2009, p. 196) And so, in the context of the United States, where tensions between its government and the Chinese government pre-existed the polarizing protest movement according to factors such as an ongoing trade war between the nations (Gregory, 2019; Wong, 2019); and the publicization of an alleged “1 million ethnic Uighurs and other Muslim minorities in internment and political re-education camps” (Kuo, 2019), American and Western media discourse was predominantly aligned with those challenging the Chinese governments exercising of authority (Jackson, 2020).

As Piñeiro-Otero and Martínez-Rolán, (2016) describe in their analysis of transnational mobilization via social media content circulation, actions such as Morey’s where he has shared an image of cultural significance which promotes the slogan and logo of an organization which embodies the ethos of the pro-democracy Hong Kong protest movement are not unusual nor overtly substantive as a singular gesture (pp. 17, 19, 31). Furthermore, political engagement where no ethnic or national relationship exists between the agent profession sympathy for a perceived issue of social justice, (e.g., by non-Black and/or non-American NBA actors participating in the criticism of racial injustice in the United States) is not irregular for NBA actors (Cramer, 2019, p. 282). In fact, della Porta and Diani (2006) assert that individual participation in social movements is in no way restricted to membership in a specific group, as anyone may become a sympathizer or supporter predicated upon one’s specific worldviews to reinforce solidarity with the plight of others (p. 131). Consequently, Morey’s actions constitute as logical given the circumstances from both internal and external

perspectives to the NBA. Thus, the outlier between Morey's actions and the others I have included in this analysis appears to be the perceived critique of the Chinese government, and not because of Morey specifically.

Conclusion

What the discussions and debates surrounding Morey's tweet reveal is that some political actions which critique issues pertaining to the Chinese government are inexcusable according to certain Chinese actors (state or otherwise). As such, the actions of these actors reveal that when possible, authority may be exercised in the form of economic sanctions so significant that American NBA actors such as LeBron James and Rockets owner Tilman Fertitta sought to distance themselves from and even chastise an American citizen for expressing his right to freedom of expression, a value which the NBA has ultimately upheld despite the alleged demands of the Chinese government and severity of these economic sanctions. However, the only thing unique about Morey's tweet in the context of the NBA as a platform for political rhetoric (as professed by the league's current commissioner, Adam Silver) is that his commentary pertained to the what Chinese entities perceived as a challenge to its internal affairs.

There is perhaps an argument to be made that by the Chinese government being so heavy-handed, they have invited further attention and scrutiny to its handling of the pro-democracy Hong Kong protest movement, a notion alluded to by Cha & Lim (2019). And so, this debacle may be more a demonstration of strength and authority by Chinese entities rather than an overt condemnation of discussing the pro-democracy Hong Kong protest movement. But in contrast to what Cha & Lim (2019), I argue that such notion does may necessarily demonstrate that China's behaviour in this case is predatory, but that China is a country which promotes and value national unity above individual glory and financial gain; an ideology which people in the United States may struggle to make sense of considering the nation's social ideologies. And so, I do not believe either entity should be surprised by the actions and reactions of its counterpart in the context of this case study; and who should each now strive to mend their relationship according to commonalities such as an affinity for basketball and profitability, while acknowledging these ideological incongruities.

References

Primary Sources

- Andrews, D. L. (1999). Whither the NBA, whither America? *Peace Review*, 11(4), 505–510. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659908426299>
- Brownell, S. (2005). Challenged America: China and America – women and sport, past, present and future. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 22(6), 1173–1193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523360500286817>
- Cha, V., & Lim, A. (2019). Flagrant Foul: China's Predatory Liberalism and the NBA. *The Washington Quarterly*, 42(4), 23–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2019.1694265>
- Cramer, L. M. (2019). Postracism Mythology: NBA Commissioner Adam Silver's "Heroic" Banishment of Racism From the NBA. *Communication & Sport*, 7(3), 271–291. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479518769895>
- della Porta, D., & Diani, M. (2006). *Social Movements: An Introduction* (2nd ed.). Blackwell Publishing.
- Dynel, M., & Poppi, F. I. M. (2020). Caveat emptor: Boycott through digital humour on the wave of the 2019 Hong Kong protests. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2020.1757134>
- Hartley, K., & Jarvis, D. S. L. (2020). Policymaking in a low-trust state: Legitimacy, state capacity, and responses to COVID-19 in Hong Kong. *Policy and Society*, 39(3), 403–423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14494035.2020.1783791>
- Fong, B. C. H., & Lui, T.-L. (Eds.). (2017). *Hong Kong 20 years after the handover: Emerging social and institutional fractures after 1997*. Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
- Huang, F. (2013). Glocalisation of Sport: The NBA's Diffusion in China. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 30(3), 267–284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2012.760997>
- Huang, F., & Hong, F. (2015). Globalization and the Governance of Chinese Sports: The Case of Professional Basketball. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 32(8), 1030–1043. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2015.1035261>
- Jackson, L. (2020). How the media creates fear, from the USA and UK to Hong Kong. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 52(9), 913–917. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2019.1669257>

- Johnson, T., Reinke, L., Noble, G., & Camarillo, T. (2020). Shut up and dribble? How popularity, activism, and real-world events shape attitudes towards LeBron James and race. *The Social Science Journal*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03623319.2020.1768484>
- Lahusen, C. (2009). International Campaigns in Context: Collective Action Between the Local and Global. In *Social Movements in a Globalizing World* (pp. 189–205). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marston, S. (2017). *The Revival of Athlete Activism(s): Divergent Black Politics in the 2016 Presidential Election Engagements of LeBron James and Colin Kaepernick*. 24.
- Piñeiro-Otero, T., & Martínez-Rolán, X. (2016). Los memes en el activismo feminista en la Red. #ViajoSola como ejemplo de movilización transnacional. *Cuadernos.Info*, 39, 17–37. <https://doi.org/10.7764/cdi.39.1040>
- Poon, K. (2017). The Impasse Over Constitutional Reform: Negotiating Democracy in Hong Kong. In B. C. H. Fong & T.-L. Lui (Eds.), *Hong Kong 20 years after the handover: Emerging social and institutional fractures after 1997*. Springer Berlin Heidelberg.
- Schiffman, J. R. (2017). Chinese Soft Power and Its Reception: A Critical Comparison of the CCTV and NBC Presentations of the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games. *China Media Research*, 13(2), 13–22.
- Zheng, J., & Mason, D. S. (2018). *Brand Platform in the Professional Sport Industry*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90353-8>

Secondary Sources

- Apple and Nike urged to cut “China Uighur ties.” (2020, July 23). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-53481253>
- Bieler, D. (2020, July 23). NBA answers to pressure from U.S. senators regarding league’s relationship with China. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2020/07/23/nba-responds-pressure-us-senators-regarding-leagues-relationship-with-china/>
- Chinese Consulate General Spokesperson’s Remarks on the Erroneous Comments on Hong Kong by General Manager of the Houston Rockets*. (2019, October 6). <http://houston.china-consulate.org/eng/sqxw/t1705494.htm>
- Coleman, J. (2019, October 10). *NBA blocks players from answering questions about China controversy | TheHill*. The Hill. <https://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/465198-nba-blocks-players-from-answering-questions-about-china>

- Daryl Morey. (n.d.). Houston Rockets. Retrieved July 24, 2020, from <https://www.nba.com/rockets/daryl-morey>
- Dave McMenamin on Twitter: "LeBron and Kyrie in their 'I can't breathe' t-shirts during pregame warmups <http://t.co/JGjmPXlpEo>" / Twitter. (n.d.). Twitter. Retrieved July 18, 2020, from <https://twitter.com/mcten/status/542114578596106240>
- Deb, S. (2019, October 18). China Asked N.B.A. to Fire Morey, Commissioner Says. *The New York Times*, 10.
- Deb, S., & Yuan, L. (2019, October 7). Nets Owner Joe Tsai Didn't Seem Political. Until Now. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/07/sports/joe-tsai-nba-china.html>
- Eppers, M. (2019, October 13). *Rockets' James Harden on NBA-China dispute: "I'm staying out of it."* USA TODAY. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nba/rockets/2019/10/13/james-harden-nba-china-dispute/3971503002/>
- Global Times. (n.d.). *Global Times on Twitter: "Freedom of speech is never free. The #NBA incident with China might help the Western world to at least pay attention to what and how Chinese ordinary people, including basketball fans, feel about #HK riots and why they are offended. <https://t.co/lrftd0Y4bn> <https://t.co/fbWCgqoTf8>"* / Twitter. Retrieved July 13, 2020, from <https://twitter.com/globaltimesnews/status/1181731004031148033>
- Gregory, S. (2019, October 17). "The Losses Have Already Been Substantial." Adam Silver Addresses Fallout From the NBA-China Controversy. *Time*. <https://time.com/5703259/adam-silver-nba-china-time-100-health-summit/>
- Huang, K., & Leng, S. (2019, October 6). *Chinese basketball body won't work with Houston Rockets after controversial tweet*. South China Morning Post. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/politics/article/3031771/chinese-basketball-association-wont-work-houston-rockets-after>
- Jaylen Brown, Mike Scott express disappointment in "bad list" of social justice messages for NBA jerseys. (n.d.). Retrieved July 12, 2020, from <https://www.sportingnews.com/us/nba/news/jaylen-brown-mike-scott-nba-jerseys-social-justice/cuod7r7e0sgo1vusvs552yfge>
- Kasabian, P. (2019, October 9). *Warriors' Stephen Curry "Not Sure" If He'll Go on Promotional China Trip in 2020*. Bleacher Report. <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/2857435-warriors-stephen-curry-not-sure-if-hell-go-on-promotional-china-trip-in-2020>
- Kirby, J. (2019, May 15). *Why Turkey has accused NBA player Enes Kanter of "terror" ties*. Vox. <https://www.vox.com/2019/5/15/18624628/enes-kanter-turkey-erdogan-nba-playoffs-trailblazers>

- Kuo, L. (2019, September 23). China footage reveals hundreds of blindfolded and shackled prisoners. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/23/china-footage-reveals-hundreds-of-blindfolded-and-shackled-prisoners-uighur>
- Kuo, L., & Wintour, P. (2020, July 2). Hong Kong: China threatens retaliation against UK for offer to Hongkongers. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/02/china-could-prevent-hongkongers-moving-to-uk-says-dominic-raab>
- Laird, S. (2014, December 4). *LeBron James can't breathe: A sports superstar finds his voice*. Mashable. <https://mashable.com/2014/12/09/lebron-james-i-cant-breathe/>
- LeBron James, Kyrie Irving and Nets players wear "I can't breathe" shirts before Cavs game. (2014, December 8). *For The Win*. <https://ftw.usatoday.com/2014/12/kyrie-irving-i-cant-breathe-t-shirt-before-cavaliers-eric-garner-lebron-james>
- Li, Z. (2012, July 25). *Basketball in China Part II: The Evolution*. Bleacher Report. <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/1271992-basketball-in-china-part-ii-the-evolution>
- McMenamin, D. (2020, July 22). *NBA players continue call for justice in Taylor case*. ESPN.Com. https://www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/29519480/nba-players-use-media-availability-steer-conversation-breonna-taylor-social-justice
- NBA Finds Local Partners (And ESPN) For NBA China*. (2008, January 15). Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/2008/01/15/nba-china-partnerships-markets-equity-cx_vk_0115markets02.html
- Pearce, T. (2019, October 19). *NBA star Kyrie Irving on Hong Kong-China controversy: "There's enough oppression" in America*. Washington Examiner. <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/nba-star-kyrie-irving-on-hong-kong-china-controversy-theres-enough-oppression-in-america>
- Perper, R. (2019, October 22). *China and the NBA are coming to blows over a pro-Hong Kong tweet. Here's why*. Business Insider. <https://www.businessinsider.com/nba-china-feud-timeline-daryl-morey-tweet-hong-kong-protests-2019-10>
- Reynolds, T. (2019, May 2). *NBA fires Turkish company that left Enes Kanter off a tweet*. Chicagotribune.Com. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/sports/ct-spt-nba-fires-social-media-vendor-enes-kanter-turkey-20190502-story.html>
- Scott, D. (2019, October 15). *Why everybody is mad at LeBron*. Vox. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/10/15/20915339/lebron-james-hong-kong-quotes-daryl-morey>
- Stein, M. (2019, October 9). *For the N.B.A., a Sticky Situation in China Will Linger*. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/09/sports/basketball/for-the-nba-a-sticky-situation-in-china-will-linger.html>

- Tan, K. (2019, August 29). *Warriors remain the most popular NBA team online in China in 2019*. SportBusiness. <https://www.sportbusiness.com/news/warriors-remain-the-most-popular-nba-team-online-in-china-in-2019/>
- Timeline: Key dates in Hong Kong's anti-government protests. (2020, May 30). *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-hongkong-protests-timeline-idUSKBN23608O>
- Wimbish, J. (2019, October 7). *Rockets' James Harden apologizes for GM Daryl Morey's controversial tweet about Hong Kong*. CBSSports.Com. <https://www.cbssports.com/nba/news/rockets-james-harden-apologizes-for-gm-daryl-moreys-controversial-tweet-about-hong-kong/>
- Wong, E. (2019, November 3). *Hong Kong Protesters Call for U.S. Help. China Sees a Conspiracy*. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/03/world/asia/hong-kong-protesters-call-for-us-help-china-sees-a-conspiracy.html>
- Wong, E., Jakes, L., & Myers, S. L. (2020, July 22). *U.S. Orders China to Close Houston Consulate, Citing Efforts to Steal Trade Secrets*. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/22/world/asia/us-china-houston-consulate.html>
- Woods, M. (2019, January 17). *Silver supportive of Kanter skipping London trip*. ESPN.Com. https://www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/25787333/nba-commissioner-adam-silver-says-enes-kanter-situation-turkey-very-unfortunate
- Yeung, J. (2019, October 23). *Shaquille O'Neal weighs in on NBA-China spat*. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2019/10/23/us/shaquille-oneal-nba-china-intl-hnk-scli/index.html>
- Yuan, F. (2018, January 17). *King again: LeBron bests Curry in China sales*. ESPN.Com. https://www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/22124345/lebron-james-cleveland-cavaliers-tops-jersey-sales-china
- Zidan, K. (2020, June 26). *NBA star Enes Kanter on fighting injustice: "Our future is in our hands."* *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/sport/2020/jun/26/enes-kanter-ergodan-interivew>