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Hong Kong identity and the press-politics dynamics: a corpus-assisted discourse study

PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01292986.2012.701315>

PUBLISHER

Taylor and Francis © AMIC/SCI-NTU

VERSION

AM (Accepted Manuscript)

LICENCE

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Zhang, Mengmeng, and Sabina Mihelj. 2019. "Hong Kong Identity and the Press-politics Dynamics: A Corpus-assisted Discourse Study". figshare. <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/13203>.

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Hong Kong Identity and the Press-Politics Dynamics: A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Study

Abstract

This article uses Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies to examine the discursive construction of collective identity in the Hong Kong press, particularly with regard to its relationship with mainland China. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis and collective identity theory, it develops a set of analytical techniques amenable to quantification, and applies it to a corpus of newspaper coverage of the 2005 Hong Kong Chief Executive election. The article uses these techniques not only to develop a representative description and interpretation of discursive patterns, but also to offer an explanatory account of the discursive construction of Hong Kong identity. It shows that the discursive patterns vary systematically depending on newspaper ownership, commercial imperatives and newspaper type.

Keywords: identity, discourse, Hong Kong, China, Corpus Linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, media

Introduction

Since the signing of the Joint Declaration between the United Kingdom (UK) and People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1984, Hong Kong has attracted substantial scholarly attention. For social science researchers, the scheduled transition of Hong Kong's sovereignty from Britain to China offered a veritable 'social laboratory' for studying the dynamics of social change (Chan & Lee, 2007:132). Hong Kong's predicament was especially interesting because it embodied a clash of two contrasting political cultures in close proximity – Hong Kong's own, derived, with unique local admixtures, from the British colonial model; and that of the PRC. Following the rules set down in the Joint Declaration, and in line with the 'one country, two systems'

principle, China agreed to abstain from extending its political system to Hong Kong for a period of fifty years. Yet at the same time, the intensification of economic relations with the Mainland and measures implemented in the education and cultural sectors were fostering Hong Kong's integration into China (Mathews, Ma & Lui, 2008; Shen, 2008). The nature of official discourse, including the discursive constructions of Hong Kong identity, changed as well. Unlike the last British Governor of Hong Kong, the first Chief Executive (CE) of Hong Kong avoided unambiguous declarations of support for further democratization, and sought to redefine Hong Kong identity by emphasizing the essential Chineseness of Hong Kong people and their adherence to common Chinese cultural values (Flowerdew, 2002).

Whether and to what extent these changes were accepted by the broader population is a matter of debate. The initial assessments suggested that the official promotion of a common Chinese identity fell on deaf ears, and that the Hong Kong people eventually re-adhered to the old notion of a distinct Hong Kong identity, defined in opposition to Mainland China (e.g. Fung, 2001; Flowerdew, 2002; Cheng, 2005).

More recently, however, there have been signs showing that, in the long run, Hong Kong people's identification with China has been on the rise (Lee & Chan, 2005; Ma & Fung, 2007). This trend is visible in the longitudinal survey conducted by the Public Opinion Program at the University of Hong Kong (Chart 1), which showed that between 1997 and 2005, the proportion of people identifying solely as Chinese citizens has risen, while the proportion of people identifying solely as Hong Kong citizens has declined. However, some poll results also indicate an increase in the proportion of mixed identities. This has led some authors to argue that what is happening in Hong Kong is not a wholesale reorientation from Hong Kong to Chinese identity, but rather a growth of the proportion of local inhabitants claiming a mixed Hongkongese and Chinese attachment (Ma & Fung, 2007: 174).

A similar shift has been noted in various media and cultural forms, including film, stand-up comedy and television (Leung, 2000, Tsang & Wong, 2004, Ma, 1999: 39-52). Gradually, black-and-white depictions of 'us', the Hong Kong people, and 'them', the Mainland Chinese, have been replaced by more nuanced and even contradictory portrayals, which suggest a partial rapprochement with the integrative Chinese national imagination (cf. Mathews et al., 2008: 76).

To say that political changes and shifts in official discourse did not lead to an all-encompassing re-sinicization at the level of identifications – be it the identifications among the local population as a whole, or the portrayals of identity present in the media – is only part to the story. The more interesting question is what contextual forces are responsible for such a state of affairs. Untangling the exact causes that trigger identity changes is difficult, if not impossible. The various factors involved in identity processes do not constitute simple, uni-directional causal chains, but are closely intertwined and influence one-another. Due to this complexity, our

paper focuses on a more narrowly defined – but to our view too little explored – aspect of identity construction, namely the relationship between identity discourses present in the media on the one hand, and the political and economic context of media production in Hong Kong on the other hand. We refer to this relationship as 'the press-politics dynamics'.

Drawing on recent research on Hong Kong media, Chan and Lee (2007) identify a number of 'centrifugal' factors within the media sector that act as a counterweight to the 'centripetal forces', and prevent the full integration of Hong Kong media into the Chinese orbit: commercial pressures, journalistic professionalism, media pluralism, and the growth of local civil society groups. In this article, we demonstrate that some of these factors can also explain the internal variety of discursive constructions of Hong Kong identity in the Hong Kong press. To that end, we develop a methodological framework that combines Corpus Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADS) with an examination of media ownership patterns and political affiliations of individual newspapers, and we apply it to a corpus of news coverage of the 2005 Chief Executive election. Although our study focuses on Hong Kong, we believe that this analytical framework is applicable elsewhere in the world, and could be particularly helpful in longitudinal and cross-national studies.

Hong Kong identity, politics and the media

About 95 per cent of the Hong Kong population is ethnically Chinese (Hong Kong statistics, 2008), yet the inhabitants of Hong Kong have long preferred to identify as Hongkongese rather than Chinese. Crucial for the development of a distinct Hong Kong identity were the swift economic recovery and the development of a capitalist economy under the British regime after World War II, and the minimization of

contacts with the PRC after the 1966/67 riots (Miners, 1991: 34). In the aftermath of the riots, the colonial administration introduced a variety of educational and cultural programmes designed to promote a distinct Hong Kong identity, premised on the contrast between the sophisticated, Westernised, and market-savvy self, and the 'backward', clumsy Mainland other (Ma & Fung, 1999). Over the course of the 1970s and the 1980s, various branches of media and popular culture, ranging from popular music to film, have also played a key role in constructing a distinct sense of Hong Kong identity (e.g. Chung, 2003, Lou, 1995). Within the realm of television, for instance, popular television series in the 1970s regularly portrayed the PRC as the evil other, and depicted mainlanders as unsophisticated and closed-minded, unable to adapt to Hong Kong's cosmopolitan and market-oriented character (Ma, 1999: 17-38).

The 1980s, however, have also witnessed a series of important changes in the economic and political sectors, which eventually stimulated a blurring of the boundary between Hong Kong and the Mainland. In 1984, following protracted negotiations, China and Britain signed the Joint Declaration specifying the terms and schedule of the return of Hong Kong from British to Chinese sovereignty, and agreed that the 'handover' would take place in 1997. At the same time, economic developments such as the rise in the cost of living in Hong Kong and China's adoption of the Open Door economic policy in 1987 prompted an intensification of business interactions; with its low-cost labour, mainland China provided an ideal manufacturing base for Hong Kong's service sector (Sit, 1995: 172). Gradually, the sharp contrasts between Hong Kong and the Mainland were softening; the Mainland was no longer associated exclusively with poverty, backwardness and cheap raw materials, but was increasingly seen also as a significant market for Hong Kong-produced goods, and a source of tourist income.

Following Hong Kong's reversion from British to Chinese sovereignty in 1997, the territory was designated a Special Administrative Region (SAR) and was guaranteed a high degree of autonomy in running its local affairs. Nonetheless, changes in the economic and cultural sectors were pushing Hong Kong closer and closer to China. The flows of investment and trade have intensified rapidly after 1997 (Shen, 2008), and public schools began promoting the use of Chinese Mandarin – the official version of Chinese language used in PRC – alongside the locally spoken Chinese Cantonese (Mathews et al., 2008). At the level of official discourse, unambiguous declarations of support for democracy disappeared, and the emphasis on a distinct Hong Kong identity gave way to notions of the essential Chineseness of Hong Kong people.

As mentioned in the introduction, the impact of these changes on public discourse and collective attachments on a mass level is a matter of debate. According to Fung (2001), the initial enthusiasm for China did not last and Hong Kong people eventually returned to the old notion of a distinct Hong Kong identity, defined in opposition to the Mainland. Similarly, drawing on public poll results from the period between 1997 and 2001, Flowerdew (2002) concludes that the first CE Tung Chee-hwa's promotion of a common Chinese identity fell largely on deaf ears. The 2003 proposal to implement a change to the Basic Law, which would allow legislating against acts such as treason, subversion, secession and sedition, also allegedly revived the adherence to a distinct Hong Kong identity (Cheng, 2005: 65). At the same time, there have been signs showing that, in the long run, Hong Kong people's identifications with China have been on the rise. Yet, rather than Hong Kong identity being simply replaced by Chinese identity, some survey results suggest that the proportions of both those identifying only as Chinese and those identifying only as

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Hongkongese are decreasing, and giving way to mixed attachments (Ma & Fung, 2007: 174). Similar changes are taking place in various cultural and media forms, ranging from film to stand-up comedy (Leung, 2000, Tsang & Wong, 2004). In Hong Kong television, for instance, the earlier depictions of the mainlanders as unsophisticated and backward have slowly been replaced by more positive and multifaceted and even discordant portrayals, within which 'an integrative national imagination is acknowledged but not fully embraced' (Mathews et al., 2008: 76; see also Ma, 1999: 39-52).

This variety of cultural attachments calls for a more nuanced examination of the interactions between politics, identity and the media in Hong Kong – an examination that, to borrow from Chan and Lee (2007: 131), 'attends to the details, nuances, and contradictions in media politics in Hong Kong and aims to "identify and conceptualize" recurrent patterns, emerging phenomena, strategies used by various actors, and specific mechanisms through which specific outcomes are produced'. In this article, we seek to contribute to this endeavour by examining the discursive construction of Hong Kong identity in the newspaper coverage of the 2005 CE Election. Our aim is not only to provide a detailed description and interpretation of the competing constructions of Hong Kong identity present in the press, but also to offer an explanation of how and why these divergent discursive patterns are related to the political economy of the Hong Kong press. To that end, we develop a methodological framework – described in the following section – that combines CADS with an examination of media ownership patterns and political affiliations of individual newspapers.

To our knowledge, this is the first systematic study of identity construction in the Hong Kong press – a fact that is somewhat surprising given the prominent role of

the print media in the Hong Kong media market. In 2007, the territory's newspaper circulation was among the top 10 in the world, second only to Japan in Asia (World Association of Newspapers, 2008: 87). While issues of political economy, media ownership, and more generally the press-politics dynamics in Hong Kong have attracted significant scholarly attention (e.g. Kuan & Lau, 1988; Clement & Chan, 1999; Lai 2007), empirical research that would systematically connect the press-politics dimensions to issues of cultural identity is lacking.

The focus of our study is the press coverage of the CE Election in 2005, one of the most important political events in Hong Kong's history since the 1997 handover. The CE is the head of the Hong Kong government, and the highest representative position in Hong Kong. The position was established upon the handover of 1997, replacing the Governor of the British colonial regime. According to HKSAR Basic Law, the CE 'shall be the head of the HKSAR and shall represent the Region', but at the same time, it 'shall be accountable to the Central People's Government and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region in accordance with the provisions of this law' (Basic Law Article 43). This peculiar position turns the CE Election into a potential focus of contestation over Hong Kong's relationship with China, which makes this event a particularly apposite choice for our study. The 2005 election was particularly interesting in two respects. First, the previous CE enjoyed little popular support and his second term ended prematurely due to mass protests. Second, the elections were marked by the active involvement of a wide range of political actors from various camps, each fostering a particular notion of Hong Kong identity and its relationship with China. This diversity was reflected also in the media.

Analytical framework and sampling

Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) have gained prominence in recent years as an effective tool for the analysis of discourse across a range of social domains, including in particular the media and politics (e.g. Stubbs, 1996; Baker, Gabrielatos, KhosraviNik, Krzyzanowski & McEnery, 2008; Prentice, 2010; Freake, Gentil & Sheyholislami, 2011). Drawing on techniques developed within corpus linguistics, such as the analysis of word frequency lists and concordances, CADS seeks to identify regular discursive patterns that characterize particular corpora of texts, and interprets their significance using tools developed within discourse studies.

Proponents of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) have been particularly eager to explore the potential of such multi-method designs, and thereby address some of the frequently raised criticisms raised by CDA's critics. Due to the tendency to use small samples and apply analytical procedures in an unsystematic manner, CDA often lacks generalizability and runs the risk of merely bearing out analyst's preconceptions (McEnery & Wilson, 1996: 76; Koller & Mautner, 2004). The application of methods derived from corpus linguistics enables the use of larger samples and thus provides a basis for generalizations, as well as increases the degree of rigour and precision (Baker et al., 2008).

This is not so say that CDA is the only one to gain from a multi-method design. While quantitative methods, such as those associated with traditional corpus linguistics, provide efficient tools for description, they do not offer much basis for interpreting what the particular measurements or frequencies might mean. To build such an interpretation, we need to examine the specific meanings attached to a word or a sequence in a particular context – and here is where CDA is of value (Stubbs,

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1996; Baker et al., 2008). Given its focus on the relationship between language and power, CDA can help interpret the patterns identified by means of corpus analysis, and suggest how they might be involved in the reproduction of power hierarchies.

CADS was used in a number of studies investigating issues similar to the one tackled in our study: media representations of refugees and asylum seekers (e.g. Baker et al., 2008; O'Halloran, 2009; KhosraviNik, 2010), as well as constructions of nationhood in public and policy debates (Prentice 2010; Freake et al., 2011). In relation to Hong Kong, the combination of corpus techniques and CDA has been used most extensively by Flowerdew (1997a, 2004), though his analysis was focused on speeches and other public pronouncements rather than the press coverage. In one of his studies, Flowerdew (1997a) analysed the discourse of the last British Governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten, in a five-year period of his office. In this paper, Flowerdew used computer-generated word frequency counting to indicate the discursive strategy behind the lexical choices. This method revealed the overwhelming positive construction of the key elements that Patten dedicated to promote: the free market economy, the freedom of the individual, the rule of law, and democracy. In his later paper Flowerdew (2004) used a similar approach to examine the discourse of the first Chief Executive of the Hong HKSAR of the PRC, Tung Chee-hwa, over the five-year period of his first term of office. This paper further developed the corpus assisted method by taking a closer examination of the frequencies of lemma and extended the corpus to Cantonese and Mandarin Chinese texts (although the analysis was done based on the English versions). The author acknowledged that the analysis of the Chinese version would bring certain differences. In spite of this, the corpus assisted approach still proved to be effective and revealed that the Chief Executive has sought to create a new communal identity for Hong Kong in the post-colonial era.

Another study of relevance to our work is Fang's (2001) qualitative examination of two Chinese-language newspapers, based on the critical analysis of labels and transitivity. This study examines the discourse strategies in two ideologically opposed newspapers on two separate controversial events. By comparing discourse features in two papers, Fang argued that lexical choices and grammatical elements may be manipulated to construct different versions of political reality presented to different readerships. Evidently, this approach would benefit from a larger corpus and a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques.

The application of CADS and CDA to Chinese language of course brings with it specific problems. It has long been recognized that there are some fundamental differences between English language (and more broadly the Indo-European languages) and Chinese language (Xue, Xia, Chiou & Palmer, 2005; Chang, Tseng, Jurafsky & Manning, 2009). One of the major obstacles to applying computer-assisted corpus analysis, and processing Chinese script with English-based software, like WordSmith, is that Chinese written texts do not contain word delimiters, i.e. space. Segmentation is the first step for text processing. Segmenting Chinese text into words requires a large language source as well as a complicated processing system and to this day, there is no widely recognized system or computer application software that is capable of that. Due to that, our study had to resort to semi-automated scanning and coding using basic facilities provided by Microsoft Office applications, and the corpus had to be limited to a practical size for hand-tagging while maintaining the maximum possible representativeness.

With these considerations in mind, we devised two analytical techniques amenable to fast coding and quantification. The first of the two quantitative techniques consists of comparing the frequencies of labels commonly used to refer to

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China: 'Beijing' 北京, 'Mainland 大陸/Inland 內地', 'China/Chinese 中國', 'Central Government 中央'. These labels were selected based on an initial reading of the subsample containing editorials (see Table 1). Frequency statistics has been adopted by discourse analysts to examine lexical choices (e.g. Orpin, 2005; Ding, 2007), and can help us identify the relationships between discourse and power (Higgins, 2004: 638). Given that the construction of collective identity is closely intertwined with the construction of the boundary between the collective self and the other (Billig 1995: 66; Lawler 2008: 2-4), we expected that the frequencies of these labels will provide an insight into whether and to what extent Mainland China featured as a relevant other in the coverage. The chosen event was a local, Hong Kong event, and as such did not necessarily require much mention of China as a whole or the Central Government – unless the involvement of the latter in the election was seen as illegitimate, i.e. if Mainland China was seen as Hong Kong's other rather than as an extended self. A higher frequency of any of these labels could thus be taken as an indicator of the greater prominence of China as a relevant other.

One could object that one of these labels – 'China' – could also be used as a label for an extended self that includes Hong Kong, in which case its proportion could be high and yet this would not mean that China features as Hong Kong's other. To address this issue, we complemented the analysis of frequencies with an examination of the meanings attached to this particular label. We devised a coding schedule to analyse the meanings of 'China' in the coverage, and distinguished between three meanings: (a) China including Hong Kong (i.e. China as an extended self), (b) China excluding and/or or in parallel with Hong Kong, (c) China in control of Hong Kong. The coding scheme was developed through open qualitative (thematic) coding based

on an initial pilot study involving a small part of the whole sample. The three meanings are related to different relationships between Hong Kong and 'China' and, therefore, indicative of three different constructions of Hong Kong identity and also three types of relations between Hong Kong and China.

The second quantitative technique involved the analysis of collocations of selected identity labels with different types of verbs, and was designed to uncover persistent patterns of discursively embedded powers relationships between Hong Kong and China. As Higgins argues, the collocates of a word (in our case an identity label) provide its semantic profile, and can 'enable the researcher to gain insight into the semantic, connotative and prosodic meanings of a word' (ibid: 39). The identity labels we focused on included two self-identity labels ('Hong Kong citizens/people') and one label for China ('Chinese Government'). Initially, the intention was to analyse the collocations of the label 'Hong Kong', yet an initial search returned too many instances where this label appeared as part of official names and titles which did not signify the collective self. Due to that, the search was narrowed to labels 'Hong Kong citizens' and 'Hong Kong people'. The label 'Central Government' was chosen because it was the most frequently used label for China in the corpus. The verbs were divided into five main categories, based on the level of activity and/or power over others assigned to the self: (a) verbs indicating activity that affects others (e.g. restrict, control); (b) verbs indicating activity that affects oneself (e.g. take to street, step forward); (c) verbs indicating one's mental activity (e.g. satisfy, hope); (d) verbs indicating one's state (e.g. be civilized, be peaceful; and (e) verbs indicating activity that affects the self (e.g. be harmed, be protected). This technique was derived from the analysis of verb transitivity in media discourse, as developed by Fowler (1991: 70-76). According to Fowler, the choice of a transitive verb – namely a verb that takes a

direct object, e.g. to shut (the door, the window etc.) or to demand (changes, democracy etc.) – puts the actor in an active, powerful position vis-à-vis others. Given our research aims, this technique could thus be used to reveal whether Hong Kong is constructed as a relatively active/powerful actor. However, a simple distinction between transitive/intransitive verbs proved insufficient for our analysis. As the pilot study revealed, many of the verbs encountered in our materials could not be easily fitted into one of the two categories, which led to a significant proportion of cases being designed as 'other', and thus called for a more nuanced coding scheme. To achieve that, we developed a five-fold typology of verbs outlined above. Using this typology we could develop a 'profile' for each of the selected identity labels, which could serve as an indicator of the relative level of activity/power assigned to it in the coverage.

Throughout the analysis, the application of quantitative techniques was paralleled by the use of qualitative techniques. These served both to fine-tune the quantitative techniques, as well as to check whether our interpretations of quantitative results were correct. Due to the limitations of word count, we cannot provide a full, in-depth presentation of qualitative results in our paper, but we do offer some examples to support and illustrate quantitative results.

These analytical techniques were applied to a corpus of 500 articles, totalling 498,173 Chinese characters, derived from five key Hong Kong daily newspapers from across the political spectrum (Table 1). The sample covers a time period of three weeks, from 3 June 2005, when the nominations for the CE Election were released, to 23 June 2005, two days after Tsang's triumph was approved by the central government. All news stories were downloaded from the online database Wisers, which offers a comprehensive and easily searchable aggregation of articles dating

back to 1998, collated from a wide variety of news sources from across Greater China, including both Chinese (simplified and traditional) and English content. While digital text databases such as Wisers have their problems and, for instance, do not allow us to take into account the original layout of individual articles (Deacon 2007), they can nevertheless provide an adequate and efficient resource for a study such as ours, based primarily on textual analysis.

The Wisers database was searched for articles published in the selected newspapers with ‘Chief Executive’ and its synonyms and abbreviations in Chinese (特別行政區行政長官/特首/行政長官), as well as the names of the candidates (曾蔭權, 李永達, 詹培忠) as keywords. The search returned 518 news, 18 of which were removed after the manual scan of headlines and first paragraphs revealed that they were not related to the event.

Titles	No. of articles	No. of characters	Average length
<i>Apple Daily</i>	108	95890	880
<i>HKEJ</i>	78	95065	1219
<i>Ming Pao</i>	130	127145	963
<i>Oriental Daily</i>	66	61770	936
<i>Wen Wei Po</i>	118	118303	1003
Total	500	498173	996
Table 1: Basic Corpus Data			

Table 1. Basic Corpus Data

To achieve our research aim – namely to link different discursive constructions of Hong Kong identity to the press-politics dynamics – we had to complement these analytical techniques with another layer of analysis. As Fairclough (2006:29) explains, the production of discourse is shaped by non-discursive conditions, including 'structural characteristics of particular societies, features of their institutions, aspects of their history, as well as factors to do with the beliefs, attitudes and values of their people'. With regard to media institutions, several arguments have been advanced to explain different relationships between the media, economy and the political process across. The influence of media owners and the impact of market pressures have been at the forefront of these debates. On the one hand, media owners – be they political parties, state institutions, or members of the business elites – may seek to use the media to further their own interests, even when these run against commercial imperatives (e.g. Curran & Seaton, 1991). On the other hand, market pressures force the media to maximize revenues by appealing to the largest possible number of readers, and to that end, the media need to reflect audience tastes (Street, 2001: 139).

Both of these forces are at work also in Hong Kong. Shortly before and after the handover, several prestigious newspapers, originally run as family businesses, including *Ming Pao Daily*, *Sing Tao Daily*, *Sing Pao* and *Hong Kong Economic Journal (HKEJ)*, were bought by business tycoons, some of which had economic interests in Mainland China (Fung, 2007:161). According to some observers, this led to the depoliticization of media content and journalists' apprehension about criticizing China (Fung & Lee, 1994). The most notable exception to the rule is the *Apply Daily*, which regularly criticizes the Chinese government, and was founded by Jimmy Lai, a garment industry entrepreneur known for his critical stance toward the PRC

government (cf. Ku, 2007:186). Nonetheless, recent studies suggest that journalistic professionalism has proved rather persistent, continues to serve as a shield against power pressures, and is often acting hand-in-hand with commercial imperatives (Lee & Lin, 2006). Due to these forces, the political orientation of individual newspapers does not always map neatly onto ownership patterns. To be able to explain why the press coverage is as it is, we therefore need to take into account not only media ownership, but also and commercial imperatives. The role of newspaper types has also been taken into consideration. As some studies suggest, tabloid newspapers have a greater inclination to populism, while broadsheets are characterized by balanced coverage (e.g. Mazzoleni, 2004), although the exact relationship between the two types of newspapers can vary considerably from country to country (Hallin and Mancini, 2004: 158-9). Table 2 summarizes how the five newspapers included in our sample fare with regard to each of these factors.

Title	Newspaper type	Political orientation	Ownership	Commercialisation
Apple Daily	Tabloid	Pro-democracy	Jimmy Lai, ex-garment magnate, outspoken proponent of the pro-democracy movement	Commercial
HKEJ	Broadsheet	Moderately pro-democracy	Economist Lam Shan-muk, with pro-democratic leanings	Commercial
Ming Pao	Broadsheet	Neutral	Timer merchant Tiong Hiew King, owing large business in Mainland	Commercial
Oriental	Tabloid	Pro-government	Ma family, improving	Commercial

Daily			relationships with the Chinese government, business interests in mainland	
WWP	Broadsheet	Government mouthpiece	Chinese government sponsored	State-sponsored
Table 2 Hong Kong newspapers – Key characteristics (based on information provided in Lai, 2007)				

Table 2. Hong Kong newspapers – key characteristics

Based on this, we can hypothesize that the discursive constructions of Hong Kong identity will vary from newspaper to newspaper, depending on newspaper ownership, presence/absence of commercial principles, and newspaper type. First, we can expect that the frequency of China labels and the level of Hong Kong’s activity/power will be lower among newspapers sponsored by the Chinese government (*Wei Wei Po*) or owned by entrepreneurs with interests in mainland China (*Ming Pao*, *Oriental Daily*), than among those owned by individuals with pro-democracy leanings (*Apple Daily*, *HKEJ*). Newspapers sponsored by the government or owned by entrepreneurs with interests in the mainland will also be more inclined to use the label ‘China’ in its inclusive meaning. Second, we can hypothesize that the frequency of China labels and the level of Hong Kong’s activity/power will be lower in newspaper subsidized by the state (*Wei Wei Po*) than in those run as commercial enterprises (*Ming Pao*, *HKEJ*, *Oriental Daily*, *Apple Daily*). The state-subsidized newspaper will also be more inclined to portray China in inclusive terms. Third, we can also anticipate significant differences between broadsheet newspapers (*Ming Pao*, *HKEJ*), which tend to be

characterized by lower levels of populism, and tabloids (*Oriental Daily*, *Apple Daily*).

The tendency to populist coverage in the two tabloids might lead to a greater focus on the relationship between Hong Kong and the Mainland, and hence a greater proportion of labels for China and the Hong Kong inhabitants. At the same time, in line with the requirements of balanced coverage, broadsheets might be likely to cover a greater variety of voices. Due to that, the semantic profile of 'China', as well as of the verbs associated with key labels, should be more diverse than in the tabloids. The only exception to the last rule might be the government-subsidized broadsheet *Wen Wei Po*, in which ownership pressures (i.e. the interests of the PRC government) may override the norms of balanced reporting.

Results and analysis

Identity labels and their meanings

The analysis of the four labels commonly used to signify China – 'Central Government' (CG), 'Beijing' (BJ), 'China' (C) and 'Inland'/'Mainland' (I/M) largely confirms our expectations. On average, these labels are more common among newspapers with pro-democracy leanings than among pro-government ones. The only exception here is the pro-government *Oriental Daily*. This result that can perhaps be explained by its tabloid character and inclination to populist coverage, with a focus on the Hong Kong-Mainland relationship. The analysis of the use of labels 'Hong Kong people' and 'Hong Kong citizens', presented later in the article, lends further support to this interpretation, although we have to acknowledge that our data is too limited to offer enough support for a firm conclusion in the issue. The only hypothesis that is not confirmed is the one about the influence of commercial principles. Although the

frequencies of the labels for ‘China’ in the state-supported *Wen Wei Po* are low, they are not significantly lower than in the commercially run *Ming Pao*.

		AD	HKEJ	MP	OD	WWP
Inland/ Mainland	Total Count	58	92	34	26	28
	%	0.06	0.10	0.03	<i>0.04</i>	0.02
	Per Article	0.26	0.59	0.16	<i>0.20</i>	0.12
Beijing	Total Count	111	96	38	105	42
	%	0.11	<i>0.10</i>	0.03	0.17	0.04
	Per Article	0.38	<i>0.47</i>	0.09	0.62	0.12
Central Government	Total Count	384	524	160	264	206
	%	<i>0.40</i>	0.55	0.12	0.42	0.17
	Per Article	<i>1.78</i>	2.08	0.64	2.00	0.90
China	Total Count	98	54	30	24	24
	%	0.10	0.06	0.02	<i>0.04</i>	0.02
	Per Article	0.45	0.35	0.13	<i>0.18</i>	0.10
Table 3: Frequencies of labels used to signify China, by newspaper. Count = count of Chinese characters						

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The examination of the meanings attached to the label ‘China’ (Chart 2) also reveals patterns that are in line with our expectations. The state-sponsored *Wen Wei Po* differs from all four commercially run newspapers: in tune with the political convictions of its owners, the label ‘China’ always includes Hong Kong. Media ownership patterns play a role as well: the two papers owned by pro-democracy elites are significantly more inclined to use ‘China’ as a synonym for the Mainland only, excluding Hong Kong. Finally, significant differences appear also between tabloids and (commercial) broadsheets. Compared to the pro-government tabloid *Oriental Daily*, the semantic profile of ‘China’ in *Ming Pao* is more diverse and closer to the one found in the two pro-democracy dailies. Likewise, compared to the pro-

democracy tabloid *Apple Daily*, the semantic profile of 'China' in *HKEJ* is closer than the one characteristic of the two pro-government papers. This suggests that the two commercial broadsheets perhaps have greater autonomy vis-à-vis their owners compared to the tabloids. Following the rules of balanced reporting, *Ming Pao* and *HKEJ* are more likely to give voice to different sides of Hong Kong's political spectrum, and therefore offer a more 'centrist' representation of 'China'. It is also worth noting, however, that all five newspapers, regardless of ownership, commercial pressures or newspaper type, most often use 'China' to refer to the PRC as a whole – that is, an extended Hong Kong's self, rather than its other.

Chart 2 Meanings of label China/Chinese by newspaper

Let us now turn to selected excerpts that illustrate what the broad quantitative patterns just outlined mean in practice. The following is a characteristic passage from *Apple Daily*:

Excerpt 1. He [the CE] should be able to push the Hong Kong economy onto the international stage, use Hong Kong as the window that takes China out, and uses Hong Kong as the access board that brings the world to China, and at the same time turns Hong Kong into a cosmopolitan city. The current issue of Hong Kong is not how to get into the mainland but how to open up the international market. Only the international stage is where Hong Kong should perform. Otherwise, Hong Kong would only become a city like China's Shanghai or Guangzhou. (Apple Daily, 19 June 2005)

In this excerpt Hong Kong is not subordinated to or integrated into China: the two units exist in parallel. Hong Kong acts as an agent that mediates between China and the rest of the world. 'China' is the one that needs Hong Kong's support in order to gain access to the international stage.

Apart from the economy, politics also occasionally serves as a marker that distinguishes Hong Kong from China and therefore prevents us from seeing 'China' as a label that embraces both Hong Kong and the mainland, as in this example from *HKEJ*:

Excerpt 2. His [Tsang's] way of expression not only caused the discontentment from members of the last administration, but also does not comply with the tradition of being virtuous and sincere among the Chinese people and in Chinese politics...In the west, politicians get the regime through elections every four/five years. In the name of 'legitimation by the people', they can totally abandon the promises made during the election and do whatever they want. In China, just because there is no clear legitimization, the leaders of the Communist Party who need to keep the reins have to be trembling with fear, cautious as in front of an abyss and walking on thin ice. They need to keep coming up with achievements, to gain popular acceptance of their legitimacy. (*HKEJ*, 7 June 2005)

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This excerpt includes two ways of using the label 'China/Chinese': one inclusive and one exclusive. When 'Chinese' is related to tradition (i.e. 'the tradition of being virtuous and sincere'), it is inclusive, and refers to something that Tsang, as Hong Kong's leader, may need to comply with as well. When related to politics, however, 'China' – where the communist party rules – does not include Hong Kong anymore.

In contrast to *HKEJ* and *Apple Daily*, the pro-central government papers most often used 'China/Chinese' in its inclusive sense, as for instance in this excerpt from *Oriental Daily*:

Excerpt 3. Maybe China is a nation that emphasizes sensibility rather than sense. In Taiwan, Song Chuyu can kneel to the public to get votes; Chen Shuibian even played a grand design of 'assassinating the president' on himself, one day before the voting date, to gain the sympathetic votes of the whole Taiwan people, and ended turning defeat into victory. (*Oriental Daily*, 12 June 2005).

In this case, China not only includes Hong Kong, but also the controversial Taiwan. Yet 'China' is not the country or the government. It is used as the label of the nation, which shares the same way of thinking and acting. By using 'China/Chinese' as tradition or culture, the papers invoke the 'imagined community' of the Chinese in the broad sense. Despite the political difference, mainland China and Hong Kong, even Taiwan, are part of the same traditions and ways of living.

Similar instances of inclusive meanings of 'China/Chinese' can also be found in *WWP*'s converge:

Excerpt 4. Tsang has always been low-key, maintaining Chinese people's humble and modest manner. He did not reveal Chairman Jiang's note till a few month later when Chairman Jiang mentioned he used to write to Tsang during a meeting with the

representatives from Financial Sector. (WWP, 17 June 2005)

Here, 'China/Chinese' is used to refer to a broad meaning of tradition and culture shared by an 'imagined community', and Tsang is praised for practising the nation's virtues.

Collocation of identity labels and verbs

With regard to the verbs associated with the identity labels 'Hong Kong people', 'Hong Kong citizens' and 'Central Government' the analysis shows clear differences between the labels (Chart 3). Among verbs collocated with 'Hong Kong people' and 'citizens', the proportion of verbs indicating that the subject is affected by somebody else's action is significantly higher than among verbs associated with 'Central Government'. This indicates that in the corpus as a whole, the power balance is tipped in favour of Mainland China.

Chart 3 Semantic profiles of verbs collocated with Central Government Hong Kong people and Citizen

For the purpose of the comparison between individual newspapers, the rather complex categorization of verbs used for coding was simplified. The two categories of 'active' verbs – those referring to actions directed at others, and those indicating actions directed at oneself – were merged into one, while the categories involving mental activity, status and modal verbs were removed since they were not that relevant for this part of analysis. This left us with two groups of verbs, one denoting activities where the subject was active, the other signifying activities where the subject was passive (i.e. an object of somebody else's action). Given that the profile of verbs collocated with 'Central Government' did not vary significantly across the papers, we limited the analysis to the verbs associated with 'Hong Kong citizens' and 'Hong Kong people' (Chart 4).

Chart 4 Semantic profiles of verbs collocated Hong Kong people and Hong Kong citizens by newspaper

The results are somewhat surprising. With regard to the proportion of verb indicating

subject's activity (the bottom two lines), no statistically relevant differences between newspapers are evident. In contrast, with regard to the proportion of verbs indicating subject's passivity (the upper two lines), relatively clear differences are apparent between newspapers owned by pro-democracy elites, and those sponsored by the government or owned by elites with financial interests in the Mainland. However, these differences are not entirely in line with our expectations – namely, newspapers owned by pro-democracy elites are not necessarily more inclined to depict Hong Kong inhabitants in passive terms. Rather, this depends on whether the inhabitants are categorized as 'people' or as 'citizens'. When they are categorized as 'people', papers owned by pro-democracy elites are, as we hypothesized, less keen on portraying them in passive terms than other newspapers (with the notable exception of *Min Pao* – a fact that can perhaps be explained by its broadsheet status). When they are categorized as 'citizens', the pattern is exactly the reverse, and runs entirely against our expectations – newspapers owned by pro-democracy elites are more inclined to depict Hong Kong citizens in passive terms than pro-government papers. In fact, the paper with the lowest proportion of passive verbs collocated with 'Hong Kong citizens' is *Wen Wei Po*.

A qualitative analysis of a sample of articles revealed that the explanation for this peculiar pattern may lie in differences between newspapers' use of the two membership categories. 'People' was the preferred category when discussing Hong Kong's relationship with the Mainland, while 'citizens' was more common where the focus was on local affairs. To check whether these patterns were indeed common across the sample, we analyzed the collocations of the two membership categories with the labels used to denote China. We also had to take into account that the label 'Hong Kong people/citizen' does not always appear in the context of a relationship

with the central government. Due to that, our analysis was limited to all tokens of the label 'central government' that appeared in the same paragraph. The unit for collocation was therefore a paragraph. The results confirmed that in the sample as a whole, the category 'people' is significantly more often used in connection with labels for China (Chart 5, far right-hand column).

Chart 5 Proportions of label Hong Kong people and Hong Kong citizens collocated with labels for China by newspaper

The comparison of newspapers (Chart 4) also revealed telling differences. On average, the two papers owned by pro-democracy elites are more inclined to discussing Hong Kong in relation to Mainland China than the papers that are owned by pro-government elites or sponsored by the state. Also, when they do discuss Hong Kong-Mainland relationships, they are more inclined to use 'people' than 'citizens'. The paper that is least inclined to discuss Hong Kong's relationship with the Mainland is, predictably, *Wen Wei Po*. In tune with the government's position, the CE election is represented as Hong Kong's internal affair, disguising the involvement of Beijing. Noticeable differences appear also between tabloids and (commercial)

broadsheets: the former are more inclined to address Hong Kong's relationship with the mainland, and tend to choose the category 'people' when doing so. Arguably, this difference is due to the tabloid tendency to adopt a populist style of reporting and, regardless of divergent ownership patterns and political affiliation, champion the voice of the 'people' vis-à-vis the government. A more in-depth interpretation of this particular difference, however, would require a qualitative analysis.

These results help us make sense of the peculiar patterns visible in Chart 3. When the Hong Kong inhabitants are categorized as 'citizens', the coverage is more likely to be limited to domestic Hong Kong affairs, and within this context, papers with pro-government media owners are inclined to represent local inhabitants as more active than the papers with pro-democracy owners. After all, citizen activity at local level is not contentious, as long as it does not challenge Hong Kong's relationship with the Mainland. In contrast, when the inhabitants are categorized as 'people', the controversial relationship with the Mainland moves into the spotlight, the semantic profiles of verbs in individual newspapers shift accordingly: in papers with pro-democracy owners, Hong Kong inhabitants are now more active than in papers with pro-government owners. Let us now turn to a qualitative examination of excerpts from two newspapers to demonstrate how these broad, quantitative trends identified earlier become apparent in single articles.

Excerpt 5. With the official appointment issued by the central government yesterday, Donald Tsang becomes the Chief Executive finally, not the acting Chief Executive, not the CE Election candidate and not the Chief Executive designate. With this change of position, *the public's expectation* will also *change* visibly. *They won't satisfy* with some sensational talks or some sales-man stories, but helping to *solve citizens'*

difficulties practically, *reflecting Hong Kong people's opinions* to the central government honestly, governing Hong Kong's affairs justly and *listening to citizen's* idea and expectation verily.

According to CE Tsang, because his term is only two years, he does not plan to develop any significant policy, but will focus on the work of politics, including preparing the blueprint for the 2007/08 political reform. We think this is a practical action, because a two-years term is very short, and there is not enough time to achieve an agreement for important social policies or reforms, let alone that the 07/08 reform plan that involves in the production methods of next Chief Executive and how *Hong Kong citizen's democratic politics would step forward*, and more importantly how to untie the knot of the Hong Kong political system. It is very necessary for Executive Tsang to view this work with focus.

... ..

The more important thing is, when *Hong Kong people* can secure a road map for the universal suffrage, *Hong Kong people* would be able to consider according to the blueprint on how to make 2007/08 election opener, more competitive and more compatible to candidates who hold different political views. For example, how to reduce the nomination requirement; for example, increase the number of the Election Committee; for example, prescribing that even with only one person participating in the election, there has to be a credit voting. In fact, the high rate of nomination and automatically-elected results in the last two CE Elections are not very ideal and are very absurd. The 2007 Election must not repeat it, and must not mark time. If in 2007 the third CE Election blueprint is the same as the second CE Election, isn't it virtually paving the road for renewing Mr Tsang's post? Isn't the 2007 reform blueprint tailored for Mr. Tsang in disguised form?

(*Apple Daily* Editorial, 22 June 2005, *italics added*)

The patterns revealed by the quantitative analysis of self-identity labels can be partially recognized in this text from *Apple Daily*. First, the journalist uses 'citizen' in sentences where no significant others are mentioned (e.g. 'solve citizens' difficulties'). In the sentence where the journalist shifts to 'Hong Kong people' also the label for the main other, i.e. the 'central government', appears. Although this pattern does not appear in every single case, this example nonetheless suggests that the two labels are used differently depending on the presence or absence of the significant other. Second, the self-identity labels are mostly used in an active way. Although we do not see any direct action on others, the self is endowed with the power to 'expect', 'satisfy', 'secure', 'consider'. The article constructs a more active image of the self, which is in line with newspaper's ownership and political affiliations.

A similar link between the use of self-identity labels and the newspaper's political affiliation is visible also in this characteristic excerpt from *Wen Wei Po*.

Excerpt 6. After being appointed by the central government, Tsang will become the second CE of HKSAR. He published the election platform of 'leadership, harmony, and people-based governance', promising that once elected he will enhance the administrative quality of the government, based on economic development, focus on the improvement of employment, build a harmonious society, *enhance citizen's* political participation, and commit to build a better Hong Kong. Tsang expressed rightly after he was elected as the new CE automatically that he won't *disappoint* the central government and *Hong Kong citizens'* hope, and must realize the promises made during the election period.

Hong Kong people see the by-election as the chance to rebuild a strong and effective government, and *hope* to elect a CE with political experience and administrative ability,

who can lead the administration team to build a real governing system according to the Basic Law's requirement, resolve the conflicts, reduce in-fighting, cohere consensus, integrate different powers of the society, lead Hong Kong to seize the opportunity, and concentrate on construction and development. Tsang's strong manner during the election *catered to Hong Kong people's years' hope* of building a strong government. Therefore he *won* extremely high *public* support and successfully returned uncontested...

The SAR government's difficulty in administration in the past was directly related to the lack of communication with the public opinion to large extent. Tsang's dialogue with the public during the election should be a start, not an end. Although the future two years is only 'the left term', with the nature of transitional government, there's still huge responsibility. Tsang should not only keep *communicate* with the *citizens* down to the community, he should also *improve* the *discussion* of administration concept between the government and *citizens*, and among *citizens* from different classes...

Of course, focusing on economic development is the first priority of the administration under Tsang's leadership. 'Developing the economy in every field' is not only the general *requirement of the citizens*, but also the sincere hope of the central government. People-based governance is the best way to *gain the public's trust*. It is believed that the political conflicts can be resolved in the harmonious environment of economic development and social stabilization, and HKSAR will open a new chapter under the new CE leadership.

(WWP, editorial, 20 June 2005, *italics added*)

In contrast to the excerpt from *Apple Daily*, the Hong Kong inhabitants here appear overwhelmingly powerless, and are mostly objects of other's actions: their participation is 'enhanced', their support 'won', they are being 'communicated' with, and the discussion between them and the government is being 'improved'. Even the mental activities related to Hong Kong people or citizens are a product of someone

else's action: they are 'disappointed'; their 'hope' is 'catered to' and their 'trust' is 'gained'. The self-identity labels are used in a way that constructs Hong Kong inhabitants as incapable of independent actions and even incapable of their own thoughts and feelings. They have to be led or manipulated by another agent – most often, the CE. In fact, the journalist assumes that it is the Hong Kong public's own will to be led by the elites. The power differential is presented not only as natural but also as something that is welcomed by the public. The uncompromising manner of the CE criticized by other newspapers is described as the strong point that 'catered' to people's hopes. This construction of Hong Kong's self-identity is clearly in line with the political affiliation of *WWP* as the mouthpiece for the central government. Yet again, we can see a clear link between the use of self-identity labels and the newspaper's political background and ownership.

Conclusions

The results indicate that the discursive constructions of Hong Kong identity vary depending on the newspaper's ownership, the presence/absence of commercial imperatives, and newspaper type. The two papers owned by pro-democracy elites seem more inclined to construct Mainland China as Hong Kong's other than either the state-sponsored paper or the two papers owned by pro-government elites. They have a greater tendency to use the label 'China' to signify a unit that excludes Hong Kong, they more often raise the issue of the relationship between Hong Kong and the Mainland, and when they do, they also depict the Hong Kong inhabitants in more active terms. In contrast, the pro-government papers are more inclined to see 'China' as a unit that includes Hong Kong, and they tend to abstain from discussing the Hong Kong-China relationship, and instead present the election as a local event. When they

do address Hong Kong's relationship with the Mainland, they portray Hong Kong inhabitants in more passive terms.

However, ownership patterns do not always coincide neatly with identity constructions. Significant differences appear also within newspapers on each side of the pro-democracy/pro-government divide. First, unlike two commercially run pro-government papers, the government-sponsored *Wen Wei Po* virtually always presents Hong Kong as an integral part of 'China', and is least keen of all newspapers to even address HKSAR's relationship with the Mainland. Second, differences appear also between tabloids and broadsheets, although they are not as clear-cut as in the case of ownership patterns and commercial/non-commercial papers. For instance, in terms of the meanings of 'China', the patterns found in the pro-democracy broadsheet *HKEJ* are closer to those prevalent among pro-government newspapers than those seen in the tabloid *Apple Daily*. Likewise, on the pro-government side, the broadsheet *Ming Pao* is in some ways more similar to the two pro-democracy papers than the tabloid *Oriental Daily*.

We should of course acknowledge that the scope for generalization on the basis of these results is restricted. Due to the absence of a suitable software package, the sample was rather small, and the number of newspapers limited. With only five different newspapers, and three variables, it is clearly impossible to achieve a high level of reliability and representativeness. Nonetheless, the paper suggests that corpus-assisted discourse studies can be of great value in the further elaboration and testing of social scientific theories, not only in the realm of communication and media, but also social sciences more broadly. For instance, with regard to Hong Kong, the analytical framework employed in this study could be extended to encompass a series of events from different points in time. Such longitudinal comparison would not

only allow us to trace the development of Hong Kong identity discourse over time and clarify the relationships between the variables examined in this paper, but also examine the relative impact of contextual variables such as the impact of economic recession or GDP levels, the relative popularity of the current HKSAR government etc. In this way, we could also avoid the danger of media-centrism, which often plagues comparative media research (Downey and Mihelj, 2012).

Furthermore, CADS could also be of great value in cross-national comparative research. Discourse and identity are often mentioned among the factors that can explain particular political and social developments, for instance the level of public support for European Union in individual member states (e.g. Hooghe and Marks, 2004), or the escalation of violence (e.g. Kolstø, 2009). So far, the empirical testing of such arguments had to rely on qualitative discourse analysis and suffer from a lack of representativeness, or resort to quantitative content analysis or survey measurements that are not particularly well suited to capturing the particularities of discourse and identity. CADS provides a better alternative: it is amenable to large sample and statistical analysis, yet at the same time also captures discursive features.

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