Chinese Discourses of Identity and Legitimacy: Representations of Self and Other in the 2019 Hong Kong Protests

As approved by the Dean of Postgraduate Studies;

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For the Qualification of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Arts and Cultures

September 2023

Abstract

In 2019, Hong Kong witnessed a series of long-lasting and violent protests since its handover to China in 1997. The protests were triggered by the Hong Kong Legislative Council's (LegCo) attempt to pass a law, which enables transferring fugitives from Hong Kong to jurisdictions with no extradition agreements within the city, such as mainland China. The 2019 Hong Kong protests, or the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill movement (Anti-ELAB), have reignited a new protest cycle following the 2014 Umbrella Movement. It represents people's demands for political reforms and produced new meanings of political resistance in Hong Kong, which created a structural challenge and conflict to the official perception of national identity in mainland China and the ruling of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Not surprisingly, this protest triggered responses from the state power of China; it introduced the Hong Kong National Security Law (NSL) in June 2020, effectively keeping defiant voices out of the media and making civil society silent.

Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological approach, this thesis specifically adopts the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), coupled with Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS) and other subsets of CDA, to analyse different identities and ideologies established in the 2019 Hong Kong protests by the Chinese state and other civil-society actors on social media. In doing so, the analysis elaborates how such discourses contribute to China's nationalist politics, facilitating the rationalisation of the CCP's legitimacy in political debates. The analysis reveals how the CCP repeatedly portrays the protests as a result of hostile Western forces' interference in China's internal affairs, igniting nationalist sentiments among the Chinese public to legitimise its rule and delegitimise others' counter-narratives. It is expected through CDA, this thesis sheds light on how representations of the Self and the Other bolster the CCP's orchestration of national identity construction, hence, justifying its political legitimacy in the Chinese context.

Keywords: Hong Kong, China, Anti-ELAB movement, Identity, Legitimacy, Critical Discourse Analysis

Acknowledgements

This thesis could not have been finished without many people's support and encouragement. Words cannot express my profound appreciation to them, but I will try to do so.

To all my supervisors, Dr. Majid KhosraviNik, Dr. Altman Peng, Dr. Michael Richardson and Dr. Gareth Longstaff, without your knowledge, experience and expertise in Critical Discourse Analysis, Chinese studies and Chinese media research, Hong Kong Geopolitics and Critical Theories, respectively, I would have failed many times during the long journey. All your ongoing support, guidance and encouragement and each feedback to my thesis in the past four years made me believe in myself and finally guided me to victory.

To my friend Viola, I still remembered those happy hours in the research office, talking and discussing Hong Kong with you, including but not limited to its history, culture, political system and relations with China. Although we may have different political viewpoints regarding Hong Kong and China, your study experience in this region gave me a great number of inspirations for this thesis, and I must say, without your suggestions and comments at the beginning of this research, I really do not know where I would start from. At that time, I adjusted my research topic and plan. However, although you had to end your PhD journey due to personal circumstances, I remain grateful to your help and support.

To my friend Nick Jensen, your viewpoints are always insightful and sharp. Also, thank you for the time you allocated to read and provide suggestions on my thesis's writing style and arguments. Good luck with your upcoming PhD viva.

At last, to my parents, you were always there along the way when I felt tired and lost hope, no matter where I was. To my wife, Fiona, your love, patience and support for me in the last few years, especially during the pandemic period, are beyond what words can ever express.

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Abbreviations

Anti-ELAB: Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill

CCP - Chinese Communist Party; the Party

CCTV - China Central Television

CD - The China's Daily

CDA - Critical Discourse Analysis

CDS - Critical Discourse Studies

CE - Chief Executive

CGTN - China Global Television Network

COVID-19 - Coronavirus disease 2019

CPD - Central Propaganda Department

CRI - China Radio International

DHA - Discourse-Historical Analysis

GFW - Great Fire Wall

HK - Hong Kong

HKSAR - The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

KMT - Kuomintang; the Nationalist Party

LegCo - The Legislative Council

MLS - Mobile Live Streaming

NGO - Non-governmental Organisation

NPC - National People's Congress

OCTS - One Country, Two Systems

PD - The People’s Daily

PLA - People’s Liberation Army

PRC - People’s Republic of China

SAR - Special Administrative Region

SCMP - South China Morning Post

SM-CDS - Social Media Critical Discourse Studies

VPN - Virtual Private Network

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

It has been over twenty years since Hong Kong's handover to the People's Republic of China (PRC) on 1st July 1997 after 155 years of British colonial rule (Liu and Ma, 2022). Under the "One Country, Two Systems" (OCTS) framework, Hong Kong has made remarkable achievements in economic development and maintained its unique status as an international financial centre. However, its political progress has frequently been a cause of concern and growing conflicts, including several protests in Hong Kong in recent years. For instance, the national education curriculum protest in 2012, the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the protests against the proposed anti-extradition law amendment bill (Anti-ELAB) in 2019.

As an important ideological battleground between the East and the West (Lee et al., 2002), the 2019 Hong Kong protests have received wide attention from both Chinese and Western media and have become an international concern issue. According to Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993), the particular ways in which the media represent the protests can not only shape public understanding of the issue, but more importantly, (de)legitimise the protests and affect the potential results of the protests. Obviously, the 2019 Hong Kong protests are no exception.

The importance of media in protests and social movements has been widely acknowledged and extensively examined (Gamson, 1995; Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993; Lee and Chan, 2011) especially since the emergence of digital and social media which has replaced the traditional media (i.e., newspapers, television, radio, etc) and become an essential part of people's daily lives. According to Fang (2023), the dynamics between the media and social movements have significantly changed with the development of digital media. For example, mobile live streaming (MLS) as a new emergence digital media technology, has played more significant roles during the 2019 Hong Kong protests compared to the traditional media such as newspaper (Fang, 2023; also see 2.3.7 for discussion of MLS and the protests).

In addition to media, through analysing the representation of numerous colourful sticky notes (e.g., words, phrases, emojis, sketches, and cartoons) hand-written

spontaneously by passers-by on four Lennon Walls in Hong Kong, Liao (2022) suggests that three concentrated formations of emotion and affect[1], namely temporality, visibility, and operationality, played important roles during the 2019 Hong Kong protests. The original Lennon Wall was in Prague, since the 1980s, passers-by have posted graffiti and notes inspired by the songs of the Beatles, especially John Lennon, a cultural figure renowned for his anti-war stance, who 'called for peace and love through the arts' (Liao, 2022: 356). According to a crowd-sourced map, by late July 2019, more than 150 Lennon Walls across public spaces, within buildings, and on the walls of stores had been established across Hong Kong, which represented a critical arena for emotional expression and the mobilisation of actions and became a hallmark of the 2019 Hong Kong protests (Liao, 2022). Overwhelmingly emotional in their appeal, these walls reflect the fervour of the movement; convey details about the objectives of the protest; articulate the longing for independence, self-governance, and democratic principles; promote defiance and tenacity; and invoke feelings of love, hope, and a sense of community to counteract emotions of fear, anger, loathing, and hopelessness (ibid). The emotional impacts of these messages are never clear-cut; instead, they are enigmatic. Nevertheless, the walls 'galvanise the population to sense, feel, experience, and act in ways that foster political feelings' (Liao, 2022: 356).

However, not all public protests receive equal attention from the media and there is often a disconnect between media representations and actual events (Greer and McLaughlin, 2010). While media's positive and prominent coverage of a protest can help legitimise the protesters' positions and mobilise public support, negative and marginal representations of a protest can delegitimise the protesters' positions and contribute to the failure of the protest (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993). According to Fowler (1991) and Fairclough (1995), the media serves as a reflection of reality and a contested space of meaning. In order to draw media attention and force the authorities to accept their appeals, some protests will resort to radical measures on some occasions (Button et al., 2002; McLeod and Hertog, 1999). However, radical groups tend to be given more unfavourable coverage than moderate groups, and they often

1. According to Liao, affect refers primarily to non-discursive intensities and bodily sensations - in a sense full of biological, psychological, and evolutional features. While emotion is produced socially and circulated culturally in discursive realms emotion is the expression of affect in gesture and language, that is, the actualisation of affect in a given moment. In social movements, affect is the unstructured, unfixed, non-linguistic, nonrational, and less-than-fully conscious intensities and bodily sensations that are incompletely experienced and approximately expressed while being squeezed into the realm of cultural meanings in protests and demonstrations. Emotions capture sensory, visceral, and emergent affect, but at the same time, the capture is never guaranteed as "emotion is the most intense expression of that capture - and of the fact that something has always and again escaped" (Liao, 2022: 358).

tend to be represented as deviant and threatening (Shoemaker, 1984; Boykoff, 2006). As McLeod (2007: 186) suggests,

> Protest groups often find themselves in a double bind: be ignored by the media, or resort to drama and risk that these events might be used to delegitimise the group.

This statement captures a critical dilemma that many protest groups face when it comes to media representation and coverage and proves to be valid during the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Although some protestors sought new media technology such as MLS (see 2.3.7) or posts on social media platforms to draw Hong Kongers' attention, mobilised like-minded people and organised the movements; however, some of their radical actions and verbal abuse towards the police and/or the masses also led to criticism from part of the general public in Hong Kong, who tended to support the government and the police. Meanwhile, even though some Hong Kong media painted those protestors as disruptive, violent, or extremist, these labels do not accurately represent the protesters' overall goals or tactics. More importantly, those protestors' violent actions were also illustrated in the Chinese state and social media platforms and utilised by the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) distorted propaganda, hence to legitimate Self (i.e., China/the CCP) and delegitimate Other (i.e., the protests/the protestors).

In addition, media representations of social protests tend to be filtered through the lens of national interests (Lee et al., 2002; Fang, 1994; Wittebols, 1996; Ghobrial and Wilkins, 2015). According to Wittebols (1996: 359), Western media tended to treat "protesters against adversary governments more favourably than friendly governments". For instance, in their coverage of a labour dispute protest in a communist country, the United States (US) media put the blame mainly on the government. By contrast, in a similar protest occurring in a capitalist country, the US media constructed the protesters as deviant and violent (Lee and Craig, 1992). Chinese media has also identified the same ideological framework (Fang, 1994). As such, it is necessary to conduct a comparative study to examine the representations of the same protest through media discourses in different countries, i.e., Communist China and the West, probing into to what extent and in what ways they align with their national interests in representing their own versions of the protests (Lee et al., 2002).

Despite the rise of new media technologies (i.e., social/digital media) playing more significant roles in people's daily lives, mainstream media outlets still maintain their

influence in shaping public discourse, reaching extensive audiences, and bestowing recognition and validity (Liu and Wang, 2022). Thus, in order to clearly elaborate representations of the 2019 Hong Kong protests, it is necessary to focus on the traditional/mainstream media on the one hand, further complemented by a close examination of social/digital media on the other hand, to illustrate how different ways used by media to legitimise Self (or us, which indicates China/Chinese side in this thesis) position and delegitimise Other (or them, which indicates Hong Kong protests/protestors in this thesis) position. It is expected that a plural and complementary view of the competing perspectives towards the 2019 Hong Kong protests can illuminate the significant role of media discourse in the representations of the protests and identity construction of different parties (i.e., the Chinese national identity and Hong Kongers' identity) concerned in the protests, and elaborate how different ideologies caused the identity conflict between the two sides, hence link to the legitimacy issue of the CCP.

As mentioned above, considering its close relationship with ideology, identity and power, this thesis applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Wodak and Meyer, 2016b; Wodak and Forchtner, 2018; Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 1991) as a theoretical and methodological approach to examine how Chinese state and social media, and social media from the West represent the same Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill (Anti-ELAB) movement which broke out in 2019 in Hong Kong. CDA as an interdisciplinary approach has been mainly associated with the ideas of Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak and Teun van Dijk. Although there is no single, homogeneous version of CDA, all these authors have in common the view of language as a means of social construction: language both 'shapes and is shaped by society' (Machin and Mayr, 2012: 3).

According to Machin and Mayr (2012: 4), CDA is not so much interested in 'language use *per se*, but in the linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures'. What is more, CDA assumes that the relations of power are discursive, which means power is transmitted and practised through discourse (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Also, as Hall (1990: 140) argues,

> Power must be understood, not only in terms of economic exploitation and physical control, but also in broader cultural and symbolic terms, including the power to represent someone, or something in a certain way - with a certain regime of representation.

Hall's argument suggests a broad understanding of power that goes beyond its traditional conceptualisations. Specifically, it highlights the power of representation, the ability to depict or portray someone or something in a particular way. This aspect of power is extremely influential but also overlooked. For example, during the 2019 Hong Kong protests, traditional media and social media platforms have dramatically shaped public narratives. These narratives can either reinforce or challenge some stereotypes, norms, and ideologies between China and Hong Kong. Also, the term 'regime of representation' refers to the conventions, rules, and norms which guide these representations. Take the protests as an example, the dominant group such as the CCP has more power than the dominated group (i.e., the Hong Kong protestors), thus, through incorporating ideologies in media discourse and applying different discursive strategies in Chinese media propaganda, the CCP can represent the 2019 Hong Kong protests from their own perspective and hence shape a legitimised Self and delegitimised Other.

Given the reasons mentioned above, and considering CDA has showcased its productivity in revealing power struggles and ideological frameworks behind media representations of protests (Trew, 1979; van Dijk, 1991; Hackett and Zhao, 1994; Fang, 1994; Lee and Craig, 1992), thus, this thesis applies CDA as both a theoretical and methodological approach to unpacking Chinese state and social media discourse and Western social media discourse in terms of the 2019 Hong Kong protests to investigate 'how power relations are exercised and negotiated in discourse' (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 272). It is expected that through CDA to analyse media discourse, the significant role of media discourse in representations of the protests and how these representations further connect to Chinese national identity construction and the legitimacy of the CCP will be elaborated.

Concurrently, in order to deal with the multiple ideologies and identities (i.e., Chinese national identity and Hong Kongers identity) that may be embodied in the 2019 Hong Kong protests of this thesis, the discourse-historical approach (DHA) within CDA will be applied in this research as the main research method. The DHA was developed by Ruth Wodak and her colleagues at Vienna University (Wodak et al., 1999; Wodak et al., 1994; Wodak et al., 1990), together with van Dijk's approach, is an influential approach to discourse analytical research on the presentation of Self and Other. The DHA focuses on inter-discursivity and the historical analysis of 'discourses in place', which emphasises investigating the issue from the historical dimension (Van Leeuwen

and Wodak, 1999: 91). It engages diachronically with the process of discourse formation and the cognitive relationships between existing diachronic and synchronic discourses and discourse topics in the explanation of discursive processes of production, distribution and interpretation (KhosraviNik, 2015: 68). The DHA distinguishes between discourse and texts - a text being an instance of discourse - and characterises discourse having '(a) macro-topic-relatedness, (b) pluri-perspectivity and (c) argumentativity' as its constitutive elements (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009: 89).

Besides Chinese mass/state media discourse, this thesis also focuses on discourse both from the Chinese and Western social media platforms, due to the latter dramatically developing since mid-2000. Social media, or broadly speaking, the participatory Web/Web 2.0, suggests the current state of the internet, which emphasises more on user-generated content and usability for end-users compared to the earlier incarnation, Web 1.0. Due to its fundamental changes in the dynamic of communication, social media ascribes new roles to the traditional understanding of audience, which has been extended from the passive role of reception to the creative, active role of production and consumption together (i.e. presumption) (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2015). This caused audiences not only to produce their own content, such as posting images on social media, but simultaneously consume other users' content. In other words, the one-to-many model of traditional mass media has been replaced by a many-to-many model (KhosraviNik, 2017). This new communicative paradigm contributes to a more globally linked, interactive collaboration of content and meaning-making processes in which new social norms and identities are created and represented.

Compared to the top-down process of the reconstruction and reshaping of social realities (i.e. linear control of 'power behind discourse' in a clear-cut distinction between producers and consumers of the discursive materials) in mass media, the emergence of new media (i.e., social media), power can accumulate, be harnessed and projected from bottom-up voices from ordinary people, contributing to individuals' identity shaping processes in a more or less decentralised power dynamic (KhosraviNik, 2017). Thus, social media sites need to be considered as political tools, as they are connected to the empowerment of the individual (Ghaffari, 2022). Against this backdrop, the researcher applies Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS) within CDA to analyse social media discourses in this thesis. SM-CDS, developed by Majid KhosraviNik, is an approach which concerns issues that CDA is facing when applied

to content generated by the social media communication paradigm (KhosraviNik, 2017). As KhosraviNik (2017) states, in addition to more structural changes in communication norms, social media technologies continue to provide exciting communication and content on a variety of topics that are clearly of interest to CDA. Nowadays, it is imperative for CDA researchers to delve deeply into SM-CDS while still upholding the core tenets of CDA. This venture would be 'much more multifaceted than considering social media as merely a data source' (KhosraviNik, 2017: 593).

In summary, this thesis applies CDA as theoretical and methodological approach, in addition with DHA and SM-CDS, to analyse media discourses in terms of the 2019 Hong Kong protests. CDA is closely and directly associated with this study due to its close relationship with ideology, identity and power, which is the research focus of this thesis. Moreover, when discourse is used by powerful people with exclusive and inclusive strategies, the outcome becomes more impactful (Vaara et al., 2021). Therefore, the researcher utilises both CDA and DHA to conduct an in-depth topic, textual and discursive strategies analysis of various discourses found across Chinese state media and uses SM-CDS within CDA to analyse both the Chinese and Western social media discourses. It is expected that by applying these approaches and methods, this study could elaborate (1). What are the representations of the same protests from the Chinese side and the Hong Kong/Western side; (2). Why there are different representations of the same protests; (3). How Chinese and Western media discursively construct the image of the Other by using different discursive strategies; and (4). How this discursive construction of the (de)legitimised Other connect to re/shape a legitimised Self. However, to explain these questions, it is vital to briefly introduce the research background of this thesis - the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Yet, considering Hong Kong has a long history of protests, thus, the researcher will briefly review the history of the protest in Hong Kong first, then introduce the research background later on.

1.2 The History of Protests in Hong Kong

Since the 1970s, protests and social movements have become a significant part of Hong Kong's political ecology (Chiu and Lui, 2000; Lee et al., 2021) where they have come to be viewed as effective means to express public discontent and resist the "unfavourable" government policies and regulations in Hong Kong (Lee, 2014). One typical example was a mass protest on 1st July 2003, which forced the Hong Kong government to postpone the proposed national security ordinance (Lee, 2020b). This gave rise to a series of protests in the following years and turned "protest marches and rallies into normalised events" (Lee, 2020b: 20). However, due to Hong Kong's conservative political culture, the majority of the protests used to be peaceful, without causing much disorder and disruptions (Lee, 2020b; Chung, 2020). Nevertheless, a new trend has appeared since the late 2000s and early 2010s as some protesters view the peaceful marches on the streets as an ineffective means to garner enough media attention (Lee et al., 2021; Cheng, 2014). Therefore, the protests in Hong Kong have become increasingly conflictual in recent years. In view of the growing political demands of some Hong Kong people and the uncompromising stance of the Chinese government, the conflictual protests have grown to be a "new" normality (Krzyżanowski, 2020) in Hong Kong.

Undoubtedly, the 2019 Hong Kong protests depict the most violent one not only since Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997 but also in the history of Hong Kong. Compared to recent and those prior protests, they all aim to fight for the Hong Kongers' identity and request democracy and freedom (Sykes, 2020). It is suggested that the democratic sentiment within Hong Kongers' identity could date back to 1967. At that time, protestors demonstrated a territory-wide campaign against British colonialism (Yep, 2012). Initially, the protest erupted as a labour dispute in Kowloon, but it quickly morphed into a large demonstration which focused on politicised anti-imperialist sentiment (Sykes, 2020: 77). Due to the intensity and violence of the protest, the then Hong Kong government finally cracked down the protest and enacted the Public Order Ordinance, which is a law formulated by the British colonial authorities and defines any gathering of three or more people as an "unlawful assembly" if they are acting in a way that is seen as disorderly and intimidating (Purbrick, 2019: 471). However, not all group activities will be considered illegal by the colonial government authorities. If the target of mass protests was the CCP, the authorities would often turn a blind eye.

In June 1989, the CCP brutally suppressed the Tiananmen Square protest, a pro-democratic social movement in China, which led to a significant number of Hong Kong people gathering to demonstrate their support of the pro-democracy protesters and protest against the CCP's action (Cheng, 2016). According to Duhalde and Huang (2019), the protest represented the most prominent public gathering in Hong Kong's history at that time. Since then, Hong Kong people gathered each year on the 4th of June to remember those sacrificed pro-democracy protestors in China and prayed that China could embrace democracy and freedom as early as possible. Against this backdrop, the yearly vigil on 4th June has become a significant symbol of Hong Kongers' fight for democracy and freedom and hints at Hong Kong people's distrust of the CCP and distancing themselves from China (Sykes, 2020).

Even after its handover to China in 1997, the protests with high violence are still seen in Hong Kong. For instance, Hong Kong erupted in a large demonstration against the legislation proposal under Article 23 proposed by the Hong Kong official in 2003, which aimed to prevent subversive actions against the Chinese central government (Duhalde and Huang, 2019). According to Cheng (2016: 389), Hong Kong protestors interpreted the legislation as a "loyal pledge to the new sovereign", which tried to flatter China/the CCP on the one hand, and as a direct attack on the city's high autonomy and freedom and democracy values based on the Sino-British Joint Declaration on the other hand (see 2.4.1). Although the Hong Kong government eventually withdrew the bill, the opposition to China's direct interference in Hong Kong's internal affairs escalated (Duhalde and Huang, 2019). Against this backdrop, another immense protest against China's direct interference in Hong Kong's internal affairs happened in 2012. At that time, the protest focused on opposing the implementation of the city-wide curriculum (i.e., Moral and National Education), which protestors feared the curriculum would propagate Chinese values and even endanger Hong Kong's democratic process (Duhalde and Huang, 2019; cited from Sykes, 2020: 80).

Following that, Hong Kong in 2014 broke out a 79-day famous the Occupy Central, or called Umbrella Movement. The Umbrella Movement, which opposed restricting the universal suffrage of Hong Kong's Chief Executive (CE) from the Chinese central government, was once again a demonstration of fighting for Hong Kong's democratic values and preserving its unique autonomy (Duhalde and Huang, 2019). According to the Basic Law, the ultimate aim in Hong Kong is to elect the CE by universal suffrage. However, China's legislature, a part of the National People's Congress (NPC), claimed

in August 2014 that any candidate for CE would need the support of a majority in the election committee, which is mainly composed of pro-Beijing officials (Birsel, 2019; cited from Sykes, 2020: 81). Against this backdrop, the Chinese central government's vetting of Hong Kong's leadership candidates will make it nearly impossible for any pro-democracy officials to be selected or not to mention considered for CE (Sykes, 2020).

To sum up, the Umbrella Movement is a landmark event in the history of social movements in Hong Kong. Its scale was built on previous political demonstrations on the street, and the protest aroused dissatisfaction with the Chinese central government's policy from the Hong Kong general public on the one hand and indicated their desire for universal suffrage on the other hand (Sykes, 2020). However, after more than two months of demonstrations in Hong Kong, the movement gradually lost momentum and ended without universal suffrage demands being met (Duhalde and Huang, 2019). While the movement failed to push and catalysing political reform in Hong Kong, it did send a landmark voice of Hong Kongers' pro-democracy sentiment to the world. In the meantime, the strong sense of political activism within Hong Kongers' identity laid the fuse for the following Hong Kong protests in 2019, and the identity issue also became a continuous but more salient subject during the 2019 Hong Kong protests (Sykes, 2020).

1.3 Background of the Anti-Extradition Bill Movement

In February 2019, Hong Kong's Security Bureau submitted a paper to the city's legislature proposing amendments to extradition laws that would allow suspicious criminals to be sent to the mainland China[2] and Taiwan for trial. This bill was aimed at establishing a system for case-by-case fugitive transfers between Hong Kong and regions with which it did not already have agreements. One frequently cited cause for this bill was a murder case which occurred in early 2018 when a Hong Kong resident Tongjia CHEN fled to Hong Kong after he murdered his pregnant girlfriend Xiaoying PAN in Taiwan. Although CHEN admitted to the Hong Kong police that he was the murderer, he could not be charged in Hong Kong due to the lack of agreement on extradition between Hong Kong, Taiwan and mainland China. However, the bill caused

2. "Mainland China" is a geopolitical term indicating the territories under control by the People's Republic of China (PRC). In 1949, the CCP defeated the Kuomintang (KMT) after fierce battle in the Chinese Civil War. This failure caused the KMT to relocate its government bodies and relevant institutions to the relative safety territory in Taiwan and founded the Republic of China (ROC). Since the PRC was formally established on 1st October 1949, the CCP saw itself as the only legitimate government in China.

widespread panic in Hong Kong, largely because of Hong Kong people's mistrust of mainland China's judiciary and legal system. Many in Hong Kong express their concerns of the bill (that it) might be leveraged by the Chinese government or the CCP to extend their control over Hong Kong, and potentially undermine Hong Kong's high autonomy and civil rights (Ku, 2007, 2020). Initially, some opponents besieged the Legislative Council (LegCo) which aiming to halt the bill from passing. However, the Hong Kong government maintained a resolute position on the issue (Lee et al. 2021). The protests thus turned increasingly confrontational, with some streets blocked, some shops - especially of the owners who spoke against protests - vandalised and some clashes taking place between protesters and the police (Lee et al. 2020).

Although the Hong Kong government announced the suspension of the bill on 15 June 2019, it still failed to pacify the protesters due to their worries about the possibility of reintroduction. The protesters even put forward "five demands", including "for the protests not to be characteristic as a 'riot'", for "amnesty for arrested protesters", for "an independent inquiry into the alleged police brutality", and for the "implementation of complete universal suffrage" as well as for "the withdrawal of the bill" (BBC News, 2019). However, given the Hong Kong government's refusal to offer additional concessions on these demands, the protests persisted until the outbreak of the Coronavirus disease in 2019 (COVID-19) (Ku, 2020).

Table 1-1 on the next page illustrates a general timeline of key events of the protests. As the protests gained momentum, there were more confrontations and violence appeared (Wu, 2020). According to Lee et al. (2019), some fully armed protestors used sticks, bricks, umbrellas and even petrol bombs when confronted by the police. In the meantime, the police resorting to force, such as firing gunshots and arresting a great number of protestors, further intensified their conflicts.

Date	Event
June 9	The first large protest took place against the extradition bill.
June 12	Protestors surrounded the Legislative Council (LegCo); police fired tear gas and rubber bullets.
June 15	(CE) Carrie Lam suspends the extradition bill.
June 16	The largest demonstration in Hong Kong's history.
July 1	Protestors storm and vandalise the Legislative Council on the 22nd anniversary of Hong Kong's handover to China.
July 21	Protestors deface China's Liaison Office in Hong Kong; at night, a white shirt man attack protestors and commuters at Yuen Long Station.
August 12-14	Day-long demonstrations take place at the Hong Kong International Airport, causing flight cancellations; protestors tied up and beaten two men from mainland China.
September 4	(CE) Carrie Lam announces withdrawal of the extradition bill.
October 1	Large protests take place on China's National Day; the police shoot a protestor for the first time with a live round.
October 4	The Hong Kong government enforces an anti-mask law, invoking emergency powers to ban face masks, which protestors commonly wear for anonymity and protection.
November 12-18	Protestors and police clash at university campuses, turning into one of the most violent confrontations as protestors used firebombs and arrows while police fired tear gas and water cannons.
November 24	District Council election in Hong Kong attracts record high turnout; pro-democracy camp wins its biggest electoral landslide.

Table 1-1: Timeline of key Events in the 2019 Hong Kong Protests (Source: Wu, 2020: 7)

While it may still be early to give a precise judgement of the direct and potential outcomes of the protests, however, the protests can be seen as a watershed moment in the history of social movements in Hong Kong (Ku, 2020; Lee et al., 2021). First, the protests have had a significant impact on Hong Kong's political and social landscape. For example, more and more citizens increased their distrust towards the government and police forces. In addition, the protests have led to a significant number of people identifying themselves as neither pro-democracy nor pro-China, which caused a much-deepening division among different people. Also, the protests have contributed declining of the general public's trust in the police, particularly following allegations of police violence and brutality toward protesters, which has caused significant controversy and criticism. Many citizens insisted that the police's violent actions, such as using tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannons toward those protestors, were disproportionate and unexpected. According to a report from Amnesty International (2021), by using excessive force against protesters and disregarding their rights to freedom of assembly, the Hong Kong police are suspected violated international human rights norms. Yet, the ongoing social unrest has had a significant impact on

Hong Kong's economy and damaged the city's image as an international financial hub. Against this backdrop, the Chinese National People's Congress (NPC) secretly but swiftly passed the Hong Kong National Security Law (NSL) in June 2020 (Lee et al., 2020; also see 7.3 for a more detailed discussion of the NSL).

1.4 Research Focus

By considering this specific research background, this thesis endeavours to provide a broad contextualisation on how conflictual identities and legitimations are substantiated through this particular discourse. Hence, there is an attempt to mobilise and organise various contextual information in explicating the ways in which the issue is perceived by both sides, i.e., the Chinese side and the Hong Kong/Western side. China is of particular research interest in this thesis as it has long been intertwined in history and relations with Hong Kong, but also a country which has different ideologies, i.e., Communism (China) vs Capitalism (Hong Kong and the West). However, instead of previous research which focuses on comparing and contrasting different media discourses of the protests, this thesis mainly focuses on Chinese side (i.e., Chinese state and social media discourses of the 2019 Hong Kong protests) although the researcher still considers Western social media discourses, in order to finding answers to specific questions, such as how Chinese media discursively 'construct and (de)legitimise the positions of Self and Other' (KhosraviNik, 2015: 4), and how state and social media platforms in China may be similar or different in their Self/Other legitimation and identity construction. Through CDA with DHA and SM-CDS, the thesis seeks to explain the nature of the conflict and illustrate systematic mechanisms of (de)legitimisation by drawing on the general context, as well as painting a representative picture of the textual patterns in the dynamics of the language used about this issue.

1.5 Research Aims and Questions

Aims

As mentioned in 1.3, the aims of this thesis are as follows:

(1). To analyse how the Chinese state and social media discourses construct notions of a legitimate 'Self' and the de-legitimised 'Other' during the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Specifically, employing the DHA and SM-CDS within CDA's framework, the study will

delve into the intertwined relations of ideology, identity, and legitimacy, exploring how 'Self' and 'Other' representations manifest in the context of the protests in various media discourses. Through this lens, this thesis seeks to offer an in-depth understanding of the prevailing narratives of the protests and their sociopolitical ramifications;

(2). To analyse what discursive themes, argumentations, and strategies the CCP used in Chinese state and social media discourses in order to construct a unified Chinese national identity and enhance its political legitimacy during the protests;

(3). To analyse the similarities and/or differences of discursive themes/strategies between Chinese state and social media discourses, and how these similarities and/or differences led to Chinese national identity construction and legitimation of the CCP, hence link to positive Self (re)presentation and negative Other (re)presentation during the protests.

Research Questions

This thesis investigates:

RQ1: How do Chinese state and social media discourse represent the 2019 Hong Kong protests through the construction and maintenance of a legitimate 'Self' and delegitimate 'Other'?

RQ2: In order to construct Chinese national identity and enhance CCP's legitimacy, what discursive themes, argumentations and strategies are used on Chinese state and social media platforms in terms of the 2019 Hong Kong protests?

RQ3: What similarities and differences exist between Chinese state media's top-down discourse and social media's bottom-up discourse in terms of identity construction and legitimation of the CCP?

1.6 Significance of the Research

This study examines how the CCP through shaping and manipulating Chinese state and social media discourses in the 2019 Hong Kong protests, to legitimise Self and delegitimise Other. Researching Chinese media discourses in terms of the protests is vital for three reasons. Firstly, although previous research have explored representations of different Hong Kong protests, there is still little information about

how Chinese media discourses represented the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Thus, the thesis tries to fill this gap by using data triangulation, which focused on varied source of Chinese state and social media discourses. The reason to do this, is to get a wider and interior comprehension of media discourses performed by the CCP, as Yang and Wang (2021) state, media system and its operation and functioning in China have never been simple but unique and complex.

Secondly, as Lee (2014) suggests, although the advantages of agenda setting, reaching a broad audience and conferring status and legitimacy still belong to the state media, however, technological advancement has made social media possible, which has been pervasive and transformative in contemporary China. In other words, the top-down media's power in Chinese state media of reconstruction and reshaping social realities has been affected by the uprising of social media, which has fostered a novel communication dynamic that deviates from the traditional one-way flow of content from 'certain (privileged) producers to (ordinary, powerless) consumers, as well as distribution processes that were at the core of assumptions about power in the mass media' (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2015: 206). Hence, instead of contextualising discourses from Chinese state media, this thesis also considers social media discourses to draw academic attention to:

> What the CCP employs discourse and micro-linguistic mechanisms - and with what qualities to legitimise the Self-identity and de-legitimise the Other identity (KhosraviNik, 2015: 3).

This process of legitimize and (de)legitimized is an important aspect of this thesis, that is, how the CCP maintains its power and authority, shaping the narratives about positive Self and negative Others to serve its interests during the 2019 Hong Kong protests. By controlling and manipulating discourse, the CCP can dominate the Chinese society from the ideological perspective, determining what views can be seen as legitimate or illegitimate. Micro-linguistic mechanisms refer to the specific ways in which language is used to create meanings and impressions. This can include things such as word choice, discursive strategies and the use of positive or negative connotations. In sum, these mechanisms can be subtle but powerful tools for shaping perceptions and attitudes.

Thirdly, as mentioned before (see 1.1), this thesis applies CDA as a theoretical and methodological approach, combined with DHA and SM-CDS, to investigate how Chinese media discourses Self-represented the 2019 Hong Kong protests, hence

linking to Chinese national identity construction and legitimacy of the CCP. It has been indicated that in CDA, there is an inextricably intertwined relationship between ideology, identity and discourse (Chang, 2012). Specifically, Fairclough's definition illustrated the internal connection among these concepts:

> Ideologies are representations of aspects of the world which contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation. They may be enacted in ways of interaction (and therefore in genres) and inculcated in ways of being identities (and therefore styles). Analysis of texts [discourse]…is an important aspect of ideological analysis and critique… (Fairclough, 2003: 218)

This statement asserts that ideologies, which are the systems of beliefs, values, and ideas that individuals or groups of people hold, are not just passive reflections of reality. Instead, ideologies shape how we perceive and interact with the world and can legitimise certain power relations, making them seem natural or taken for granted. In addition, ideologies are not just abstract ideas; instead, they are enacted in concrete ways of interaction and inculcated in identities. At the same time, identities can be shaped by ideologies. By examining discourse, we can uncover the ideologies they want to reflect, reinforce, or challenge and see how language is used to construct particular meanings, representations, or identities, and how it contributes to establishing, maintaining, or challenging power relations.

Viewing discourse as a form of social practice that develops, sustains, reinforces and reflects both ideology and identity, CDA specialists endeavour to uncover the concealed and 'seemingly neutral' ideologies (Chang, 2012: 6) of prevailing powers embedded in discourse in order to raise public awareness of the adverse effects of these hidden ideologies and ultimately seeking to address the inequalities perpetuated and bolstered through discourse (Chang, 2012). As Fairclough claims:

> CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse which views language as a form of social practice and focuses on the ways social and political domination are reproduced by text and talk (Fairclough, 1989: 20).

This quotation suggests CDA is not just about examining language structure or usage. Instead, it aims to reveal how discourse, as a way of speaking, writing, or thinking, shapes and is shaped by social relations of power and domination. By doing so, CDA seeks to critique these relations, eliminate those unequal powers, and promote social change. As a transdisciplinary instrument to analyse discourse, CDA has been broadly applied by a number of scholars in Europe. For instance, Ruth Wodak and Gunther

Kress in the United Kingdom (UK), Teun van Dijk in the Netherlands, Utz Maas and Siegfried Jäger in Germany (Chang, 2012).

Given the close relations between ideologies and identity, and considering identity is the key research aspect of this study, it is important to discuss the brief definition of identity here. According to Martin (1995: 2), identity as 'the life of a human being as a person, requires the presence of the Other, that is, the perception of someone different and the establishment of a relationship with him/her/them'. Hall (1996a: 4) claims that '. . . it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the 'positive' meaning of any term - and thus its 'identity' - can be constructed'. Hence, based on Martin and Hall's definition of identity, it is suggested that identity contains two sides, Self and Other, and without Other, it is impossible to give a precise definition of identity. In the meantime, If we see Self-identity as unmarked and essential and positive, then the identity from the Other is the marked form which is excluded and must be negative (Laclau, 1990, cited from Flowerdew, 2012). In order to retain Chinese national identity (see 2.2.4), on the one hand, the CCP has propagated patriotism/nationalism on Chinese media to represent a legitimised Self. By excluding and depressing other minority ethnic groups (i.e., Hong Kong, Uygur and Tibet) to represent a delegitimised Other.

In this study, it is all known that although Hong Kong has an intertwined history with China during the ancient time (i.e., in Qing dynasty), it still has a colonial history under the British rule in recent period (i.e., from 1842 to 1997). Thus, the Hong Kongers has shaped its unique identity which is different from Chinese national identity. Although the 2019 Hong Kong protests were caused by the anti-extradition bill, in fact, it reflected identity conflict between Hong Kong and China, which is worth researching by analysing media discourses from both the Chinese and Western side. Besides, how the identity conflict would affect the CCP's legitimacy will also be examined. Considering the CCP is the only ruling party in China, its legitimacy has faced many challenges.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, China has become the largest country governed by a communist party in the world. Although the CCP experienced a drastic within-party reform, it achieved regime stability and economic modernisation without adopting democratic competitive elections and survived as 'one of the five communist countries

after the end of the Cold War' (Huang and Pang, 2022: 972). After Mao Zedong's death in 1976, the CCP regime lacked substantial legitimacy based on political participation, and premised its regime legitimacy 'upon the twin pillars of nationalism and economic prosperity' (Reilly, 2004: 283, see 2.2.7). According to Bozonelos et al. (2022), nationalism is an ideology where devotion and loyalty to one's state are more important than other interests, and it links to national identity. The stronger the national identity, the stronger the sense of nationalism. On the other hand, Schneider (2018) claims that nationalism is becoming a defining feature of the global political climate, and populist nationalism has been experiencing a renaissance across the whole world (Deckman and Cassese, 2021; Flew and Iosifidis, 2020; Postill, 2018; cited from Peng, 2022: 281). Such political climate and political trend are also to be found in China and have profound impact to the East Asian superpower, as the rhetoric of nationalism in China's (see 2.2.7 for detailed discussion of Chinese nationalism) domestic politics exhibiting increased compatibility with Western right-wing populism (Lin, 2021; cited from Peng, 2022: 282).

According to Tang and Darr (2012), the core of Chinese nationalism is deeply entwined with its unique historical narrative, emphasising eras marked by national humiliation due to foreign encroachments. Nowadays, although China undoubtedly has become a powerful country with substantial international influence, however, there remains a prevailing nationalist sentiment in China, which reminds its people to 'remember their past humiliated history in their minds' (Peng, 2022: 283). As Peng (2022) claims, the CCP has harnessed this nationalist sentiment since the era of Reform and Opening Up initiated by Deng Xiaoping. Although Chinese economic booms during this period, it also brought challenges like governmental corruption, wealth disparities and growing societal divides, undermining the state's credibility (Peng, 2022). While the national sentiment emphasises 'the country's renaissance on the world stage' (Peng, 2022: 283), national pride represents an 'important value shared by the regime and its domestic critics' (ibid). In this context, the CCP employs nationalist narratives as a cohesive tool to bolster its domination and got more support from the Chinese general public. As aforementioned, thus, nationalism, combined with economic growth, has become two pillars of the CCP's regime legitimacy (see 2.2.7).

Back to this research, it is anticipated that employing CDA will provide a nuanced understanding of the intricate ties binding national identity, nationalism, and legitimacy of the CCP, especially when exploring Chinese and Western media discourses

surrounding the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Specifically, from the Chinese side, it is important to conduct research from both state media and social media by collecting various discourses (i.e., articles and editorials from Chinese state media outlets and social media posts and comments) due to the latter one (i.e., social media) gained advancement development. By analysing Chinese state media discourses, the researcher reveals that the protests have challenged both Chinese national identity and the CCP's authority to rule in Hong Kong, although the CCP has legal sovereignty over the territory. However, the CCP utilised state media to propagate its ideologies, hence, to legitimise Self and delegitimise Other. Despite such ideologies helping the CCP gain public support in China, however, the CCP has lost Hong Kongers' trust in its rule in the region (Tang and Wong, 2021). While on Chinese social media platforms, the very core discursive theme of the protests is nationalism. According to Huang and Pang (2022), nationalism has become the greatest tool for the CCP to gain the support of the public and hence construct a unified Chinese national identity. By analysing such discourses, the researcher indicates that during the protests, the increased nationalistic narrative on Chinese social media, along with the state media's propaganda has effectively fortified the CCP's legitimacy.

Conversely, discourses from Other side (i.e., Hong Kong media/Western social media platforms) suggest that a great number of people represent the protests with either neutral or positive attitude and potentially support the protests, which is opposite to the Chinese side representation and hence challenged the CCP's narrative. Thus, it is important to examine how the protests exposed identity clash between Hong Kong and China, along with the legitimacy of the CCP by analysing both Chinese and Western media discourses.

1.7 Structure of the Thesis

Chapters 2 serves as the Literature Review of the thesis. It focuses on the macro-level of China, which consists of three sub-sections: (1). Socio-political background of China; (2). Chinese media discussion, and (3). China and Hong Kong's relationship. Firstly, this chapter focuses on the CCP, including its history, Chinese economic achievements since the Reform and Opening up, and identity and legitimacy issues, which serve the core aspects in the whole thesis. Thus, this chapter briefly introduces the concept of (traditional) legitimacy and how the CCP as a non-democratic regime, deals with the legitimacy crisis, thus maintaining its legitimacy since rising to power in

1949. This section provides an aspect of understanding the general background of China and the CCP. Next, this chapter deals with the Chinese media system, which emphasises on Chinese state media and social media's development, state media control and social media censorship, and grassroots counterflows. Finally, this chapter briefly discusses Hong Kong's history, and its relationship with China in the post-handover era since 1997.

Chapter 3 is the methodology chapter. This chapter explains what CDA is and why applies CDA as a methodological approach in the whole thesis, by explaining several notions in CDA, such as 'critique'/'critical', 'discourse', and 'analysis', power and ideology in CDA, CDA and Self/Other representations, CDA and the media. In addition, the researcher explains DHA and SM-CDS approaches within CDA. The former is used by analysing state media discourses, while the latter is used by analysing social media discourses. By doing this, the researcher justified CDA is an appropriate method to apply in the thesis. At the end of this chapter, the researcher explained in detail of data collection, both from the Chinese state media and social media, and Western social media platforms.

Chapters 4 - 6 serve as data analysis chapters of the whole thesis. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss and analyse media discourses from Chinese state media and social media regarding the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Through analysis, these chapters shed light on how the CCP incorporated ideologies in Chinese media to propagate disinformation and inciting so-called patriotism but essentially nationalism, to construct Chinese national identity and justify CCP's legitimation of power, hence legitimise Self and delegitimise Other. These two chapters serve as Self representation of the protests. Chapter 6 takes a glimpse into discourse from Western social media platforms, such as posts and comments on Facebook and Twitter, to analyse how Other represent this issue.

Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter. In this chapter, I conclude the main findings from previous data analysis chapters, also discuss the thesis's limitations, and shed light on suggestions for future research regarding Chinese politics and Hong Kong social mobilisation since the implementation of the NSL in June 2020.

Chapter 2. Literature Review - China: Socio-political Background, Media Systems and Relations with Hong Kong

2.1 Introduction

To begin, this chapter reviews China's socio-political background, media system and relations with Hong Kong. It firstly discusses the broad sense of the CCP, including its history, its so-called communism, Chinese economic achievement since the reform and opening up (the most crucial policy the CCP implemented), the notion of identity and how the CCP as a non-democratic regime, maintains legitimacy through economic development and nationalism. After that, this chapter focuses on the Chinese media system, which pays special attention to the background of Chinese state media and social media, state media control and social media censorship, and how grassroots counterflows social media censorship. Finally, considering the research background of the thesis, it is necessary to discuss the relations between China and Hong Kong, including Hong Kong's brief history and the relationship with China, especially since the handover in 1997.

2.2 Brief History of Modern China and the CCP

China as a country, is united and totalitarian, and also has a strong impression of Sino-centrism and cultural supremacy since ancient times (Chang, 2012). Sino-centrism, which refers to:

> From the geopolitical perspective, China is the leading or dominant global power. This can involve viewing global affairs through the lens of China's interests, strategies, perspectives, and anticipating a future world order led or dominated by China. It also involves promoting Chinese culture, values, or governance models as superior, universal, or normative (Emphasis from myself).

It is noteworthy that Sino-centrism emerged from the traditional Chinese worldview, which saw China as the "Middle Kingdom", positioned centrally in both a cultural and geographical sense, with surrounding nations often perceived as "barbarian" or peripheral. While this worldview has ancient roots, however, its implications can affect current China in various forms, for example, economic policies like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (see 2.2.3 for detailed discussion of China's economic development); political implications such as disputes in the South China Sea with Vietnam and Philippines, and Diaoyu island/Senkaku island with Japan. More importantly, Sino-

centrism also indirectly shapes Chinese national identity (see 2.2.4 for brief introduction of national identity) and partly led to the current nationalism emotions (see 2.2.7 for detailed discussion of nationalism) in China. That is, Sino-centrism providing a sense of cultural superiority and continuity from ancient civilisation to the modern powerhouse, hence, it has bolstered Chinese nationalism. At the same time, this narrative (i.e., nationalism) has been used to foster a sense of unity and purpose within the country, especially in times of facing external criticism, such as the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

Qin Shi-Huang (259-210 BC), an infamous tyrant and dictator, was the first emperor to unite ancient China as a centralised empire (Chang, 2012). However, the ongoing modernisation of China finally gives birth to another totalitarian country, the PRC (or called [mainland] China) with the authoritarian regime, the CCP. Given that the CCP is mainland China's founding and sole ruling party (Truex, 2016; Mattingly, 2019) and has hugely affected China since its ruling in 1949, it is inevitable to introduce the CCP's origin and background first to comprehensively understand the socio-political background of current China. The origin of the CCP can be traced back to the May Fourth Movement in 1919, during which radical Western ideologies such as Marxism and anarchism gained momentum among Chinese intellectuals (Xinhua News Agency, 2011). According to the CCP's official history, the CCP was formally founded on 1st July 1921, with the help of the Far Eastern Bureau of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Far Eastern Secretariat of the Communist International (He, 2007). Two years later, Sun Yat-sen invited the CCP joins his Kuomintang (KMT) and the two parties established the United Front in China.

The CCP got rapid development during the Northern Expedition, which started in 1926. However, as the military campaign nearly succeeded, the CCP met havoc due to the White Terror unleashed by Sun Yat-sen's successor, Chiang Kai-shek. During the crisis moment, Mao Zedong became the CCP's leader, establishing rural bases and creating the Chinese Red Army. Under Mao's leadership, the CCP gained several victories on the battleground, such as the Second Sino-Japanese war between 1937 and 1945 and the following Chinese Civil War from 1945 to 1949. On 1st October 1949, the PRC was formally established by Chairman Mao Zedong and since then, the CCP became the sole legality government in mainland China.

After Mao Zedong died in 1976, a power struggle erupted between the then CCP's chairman Hua Guofeng and vice-chairman Deng Xiaoping, and Deng finally gained victory. After that, Deng introduced the Reform and Opening Up policy in order to reverse Mao's leftist policies and save China from the malignant economic crisis (also see 2.2.3). The Reform and Opening Up policy emphasise the ideological concept of socialism with Chinese characteristics on the one hand and opens China's market to the world on the other hand. Since then, the Chinese economy made significant progress. However, the policy was challenged by both Maoists (or 'leftists'), which refers to those people who have similar ideologies (i.e., Marxism-Leninism) and policies (e.g., Self-reliance economic policy) with Chairman Mao Zedong, and those who supported political liberalisation (or 'rightists') in China. Meanwhile, with the cumulation of other social conflicts such as the widespread of corruption, and the death of the reformist leader, Hu Yaobang, finally led to the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 (Sullivan, 2012). After that time, the CCP returned to the conservative economic policy due to concerns of inside political instability and social unrest. From outside, international isolation and economic sanctions further exacerbated this situation. Against this backdrop, the Reform and Opening Up policy was temporarily stalled.

However, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, combined with the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe, caused the world situation to change and led Deng Xiaoping seriously believe that only rapid economic development could sustain the popular support of the CCP and avoid the same fate such as Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union (Vogel, 2011). By the early 1990s, the CCP started recalibrating and continuing economic reforms, albeit with a different emphasis. For example, the leadership prioritised financial stability and gradualism on the one hand, while maintaining tight political control to ensure social stability and the Party's absolute dominance on the other hand. In 1997, the CCP embedded "Deng's beliefs" (Deng Xiaoping Lilun, "邓小平理论") into the Party's constitution (Vogel, 2011: 682-684).

Following Deng, Jiang Zemin succeeded as the CCP's Secretary General in the 1990s and inherited most of Deng's policies. From that time, the CCP transformed from a veteran revolutionary party which led militarily and politically to a political elite increasingly regenerated according to institutionalised norms in the civil bureaucracy (Miller, 2021). This transformation suggests while the party still retains its revolutionary symbols and occasionally looks back to its revolutionary past, its operations and priorities have changed considerably compared to the early days. As part of Jiang

Zemin's nominal legacy, the CCP ratified the "Three Represents" (Sange Daibiao, "三个代表") for the 2003 revision of the Party's constitution as a "guiding ideology" to encourage the party to represent "advanced productive forces, the progressive course of China's culture, and the fundamental interests of the people" (Sullivan, 2012: 238).

In 2002, Hu Jintao took office as Jiang Zemin's successor. Unlike previous leaders such as Mao, Deng and Jiang, due to the lack of personal power and charisma, Hu emphasised collective leadership and opposed one-person dominance of the political system (Duchâtel and Godemen, 2009). In the meantime, long-time insistence on fast economic growth has led to a series of serious social problems in China. In response to these issues, Hu proposed two main ideological concepts: the "Scientific Outlook on Development" (KeXue Fazhan Guan, "科学发展观") and "Harmonious Socialist Society" (HeXie SheHui, "和谐社会") (Sullivan, 2012: 329). Both of these ideologies influenced China's approach to development during Hu Jintao's tenure and continue to shape the trajectory of current Chinese policies. However, it is noteworthy that while these concepts were introduced to address genuine issues, their implementation has been mixed. For instance, there have been significant improvements in some areas, such as poverty reduction and infrastructure development, challenges like political reforms and freedom of expression remained and even exacerbated.

Ten years later, at the eighteenth National Congress meeting held in 2012, Xi Jinping took over the helm and became the fifth-generation leader of the CCP. Xi, the putative Mao Zedong of the twenty-first century, introduced the term "the Chinese Dream" (Zhongguo Meng, "中国梦") shortly after he took office. At its core, "the Chinese Dream" emphasises the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and aims to construct a prosperous, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious, modern socialist country at the centenary of the establishment of the PRC in 2049 (China Daily, 2021). It encapsulates both the Chinese people's collective aspirations and the country's developmental ambitions, and this concept has become a central element of Xi's ideology and has been woven into contemporary China's broader political and cultural fabric.

2.2.1 The CCP and Communism

The Constitution of the CCP emphasises that the highest ideal and ultimate goal of the Party is to achieve communism (Xinhua News Agency, 2017a). Instead of seeking to

integrate China with international values, the “core leader” of the CCP has gone the opposite direction by asking his countrymen to go after the illusive realm of Communism. For instance, in 2015, the current CCP’s Secretary General Xi Jinping mentioned Communism as:

> Although we may not reach Communism in one step, we cannot see Communism as an illusion just because it requires an enduring process. Revolutionary ideals are as high as the sky, and achieving Communism is even the highest ideal of every Communist Party member. All affiliates of the CCP must become honest and dedicated Communists (Lam, 2018: 6).

This statement from Xi may serve as both a declaration of intent and a rallying cry for the CCP members. It emphasises the Party’s long-term commitment to its revolutionary ideals, underscores the centrality of the goal of Communism, and sets the standard of dedication and integrity expected of every party affiliate. However, since the demise of Chairman Mao Zedong, few cadres and members of the CCP have retained any faith in socialism, let alone communism. Although Deng Xiaoping, China’s Great Architect of Reform, sought to demystify socialism by inventing the concept of ‘the primary state of socialism’ (Lam, 2018: 7) and mentioned that China would stay in the socialist primary stage for a long time, in fact, Deng’s concept is the more likely the euphemism for Chinese-style capitalism. At the same time, even more so with communism. As the founders of communism, both Karl Marx and Friedrich Engles deemed this concept a Utopian ideal.

Yet, Xi seems stubbornly but perfectly inherited Mao’s governance philosophy (i.e., Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought) and Mao’s ideologies (i.e., Socialism and Communism). He even developed these notions based on the current situation and his own ideas. Seen and commented on by The New York Times as the second coming of Mao Zedong, Xi’s acknowledgement of a Communist order being ushered into China in the not-too-distant future seems symptomatic of a particularly perplexing form of ‘historical nihilism’ (Lam, 2018), which is a term often used in Chinese political discourse, especially by the CCP, to criticise perspectives or interpretations of history that deviate from or challenge the official narratives and views the Party promotes. Essentially, this concept refers to historical revisionism or the denial of specific established historical facts, especially those that ‘pertain to the revolutionary history of the CCP and the foundational stories of mainland China’ (Emphasis from myself). In actual fact, Communism is more likely to be the CCP’s propaganda which mainly

focuses on igniting its nationalist base and also emphasises neoliberalism and authoritarianism.

2.2.2 The CCP and China's Economic Achievement

In 1978, the CCP's then Secretary General Deng Xiaoping launched the Reform and Opening Up policy in China, which focused on economic reforms. The Reform and Opening Up policy aims to establish a socialist market economy under the 'socialism with Chinese characteristics' (Huang, 2018: 85), a term coined by Deng himself to redefine the relationship between planned economy and socialism, market economy and capitalism. More specifically, it is a pragmatic approach to governance that blends economic reforms with political control, which represents China's development model that is distinct from both traditional socialist models and Western capitalist models. This term encapsulates China's development since the post-Mao era, that is, prioritising economic growth, social stability, and the CCP's continued dominance. Since then, the growth of China's Gross domestic product (GDP) has averaged almost 10 per cent yearly, and more than 800 million people have been lifted out of poverty (The World Bank, 2022). In the meantime, there have also been significant improvements for Chinese people in access to health, education, and other services over the same period due to China's speedy economic development, which significantly improved Chinese people's national self-confidence and sense of national honour.

After forty years under the Reform and Opening Up policy, China is now the second-largest economy globally. Its economy accounts for more than 25 per cent of total global growth and is approaching high-income country status (Lam, 2018). In 2013, the CCP's Secretary General Xi Jinping initiated the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI, YiDai YiLu Changyi, "一带一路倡议")[3], which is a brave attempt to connect China with dozens of countries in Asia, Central Asia, Europe and Africa 'through infrastructure projects such as bridges, ports and high-speed rails, many of which are financed by Chinese banks and companies' (Lam, 2018: 3). More significantly, Chinese outbound direct investment (ODI) has since 2015 exceeded inward capital flow, and that 'China

3."The Belt and Road Initiative" refers to the New Silkroad Economic Belt, which stretches from Central Asia to Eastern Europe, and the 21st Century Maritime Silkroad, which links up Southeast Asia, the Indian Subcontinent and East Africa (Lam, 2018: 19).

buys the world' (ibid) has become the rallying cry of Chinese multinational companies aggressively purchasing oilfields, agricultural lands, and high technology firms around the world. Yet, with the fears that China's foreign exchange reserves dwindle and the Chinese government's concern about uncontrolled capital outflows, Beijing's ability to 'buy influence or project power through means such as ODI and financing infrastructure projects may soon have serious problems' (Lam, 2018: 3-4).

In addition to the BRI, China also supports the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Brazil, China, India, Russia and South Africa (BRICs) Bank, which aims to build a China-centric global financial architecture (Lam, 2018). Subsequently, to combat the Trump administration from the US abandoning the Transpacific Pact (TPP)[4] and joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)[5], China also puts more effort into 'persuading Asia-Pacific countries to join China-led free-trade arrangements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership' (RCEP)[6] (Lam, 2018: 4), which is a significant milestone for economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region and embodies the collective ambition of its member countries to foster closer economic ties and collaborations.

Although the Reform and Opening Up policy provided a significant opportunity for China's high speedy economic development for nearly forty years, over the past few years, economic growth in China has decelerated due to structural constraints such as a declining labour force, diminishing returns of investment and the slowing of productivity. In addition, the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has exacerbated the economic situation. Of particular notice is, in a marked shift from the Reform and Opening Up policy, China recently is increasingly tightening the state's hand over business and economy. For instance, Chinese officials are putting more pressure on

4. The TPP, a mammoth free-trade area that does not cover China, is deemed a weapon by the United States to exclude the PRC. It was key to former president Obama's "pivot to Asia" strategy. After Trump decided to drop the TPP, Beijing has been pushing the establishment of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which will rope the ASEAN members plus China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand (Lam, 2018: 20).

5. The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) is a free trade agreement between Canada and 10 other countries in the Asia-Pacific. CPTPP covers virtually all sectors and aspects of trade between Canada and member countries to reduce trade barriers and facilitate trade (Lam, 2018: 20).

6. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a free trade agreement (FTA) between the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and its five FTA partners (Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand and Republic of Korea) (Lam, 2018: 20).

some private companies with significant influence and success since 2021 (e.g., Alibaba and Tencent), such as designating members of the CCP into these private companies' managing boards and bending their will to obey the CCP's commands (Roberts, 2021). It seems the regime has come to see these companies as a rising threat, yet it appears that China's economy is being forced to take a backseat to politics, as exemplified by the Mao Zedong-era slogan "politics in command" (Roberts, 2021: para 3), which originated in China during the line struggle within the Central Committee: the right opportunist line headed by the capitalist-roaders and the left proletarian line headed by the communists. The rightist-revisionists focused on 'pure' economic development, while the proletarian line opposed the revisionists by keeping the idea that all economic decisions should arise from political decisions. Nevertheless, putting political-first ideology on economic development, and considering China's recent economic policy adjustment due to the world situation changes and the declining relationship with the U.S and other Western countries, the Chinese government has emphasised the "Domestic-International dual circulation" in 2020, which is a strategy to reorient China's economy by prioritising domestic consumption ("internal circulation") while remaining open to international trade and investment ("external circulation") (Buckley, 2020). Nevertheless, all of these internal and external factors and the policies shifting cast a shadow on the future of Chinese economic growth.

2.2.3 Chinese National Identity

Identity is constructed by time and space, and a person's identity can be traced from where he or she comes from, both in terms of time and space (Flowerdew, 2012). In recent years, the concept of national identity and how it is constructed through discourse has drawn much focus from scholars. For instance, Wodak et al. (1999: 290) claim that:

> [The] national identity of individuals who perceive themselves as belonging to a national collectivity is manifested, inter alia, in their social practices, one of which is discursive practice. ... The discursive practice as a special form of social practice plays a central part both in the formation and in the expression of national identity.

This quotation delves into the relationship between national identity and discursive practice, suggesting that the way we communicate (both in terms of language and/or broader forms of expression) is instrumental in both shaping and reflecting our sense of national belonging, which is an inner understanding of one's affiliation with a group

that shares common characteristics rooted in history, culture, language, or shared experiences. In addition, discursive practice, as a unique social practice, plays a pivotal role in national identity, which refers to, on the one hand, the way we talk about our nation, the symbols and narratives we are exposed to actively shape our understanding and feelings of national identity. On the other hand, once we have a sense of national identity, it gets communicated and reinforced through our discursive practices. For example, when I proudly talk about China's economic achievements or discuss China's glories history in the past, I expressed my own national identity.

Against this backdrop and considering the important discursive dimension of identity, Flowerdew (2012: 25) claims that 'identity can be projected onto subjects', which he suggests the dynamic interplay between personal and societal forces in shaping one's identity. While individuals have their own intrinsic sense of Self, they also navigate into the world that can influence how they perceive themselves and how Others perceive them. In addition, according to Flowerdew (2012), a region or country with rapid ideology changes (e.g., Hong Kong) may be accompanied by a change in the discursive construction of identity. This means that rapid ideological shifts change the political and social landscape and influence the very language and symbols with which people understand and express their identity. These discursive shifts reflect more profound socio-political transformations and the ongoing struggle to define and redefine identity in changing contexts. However, the articulation of national identity is 'a gradual process in which histories, traditions and social memories are invented, revised and reproduced' (Flowerdew, 2012: 25), which indicates that national identity is not a firm concept through generations. Instead, it is a fluid construct continually shaped and reshaped by various forces. Also, this statement implies that while national identity can be a source of unity and pride, it can also be contested, with different groups vying for their version to be recognised.

Additionally, identity is a key element when discussing the discursive struggle between unequal powers (Chang, 2012), i.e., China and Hong Kong during the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Identity is a sense of who we are, which influences our beliefs and values. It involves 'a sense of belonging to a group, either ethnic, racial and cultural, or linguistic and national' (Cao, 2019: 433). Erikson (1959: 27-28) defines identity as 'a mutual relation - it connotes a persistent sameness within oneself while sharing some characteristics with others' (cited from Cao, 2019: 433). As aforementioned (see 1.6), it is only through the relation to the Other that identity can be constructed. 'If (Self)

identity is viewed as positive, then the Other must be viewed as negative; the Other is the marked form which is excluded, while the Self is unmarked and essential' (Flowerdew, 2012: 25).

As this thesis aims to examine ideological conflict between Hong Kong people and Chinese people during the 2019 Hong Kong protests, which partly (or mostly) arises from (Chinese) national identity and (Hong Kongers') identity conflict. Hence, it is significant to introduce what is nation, and what is national identity first. Smith (1991) states the nation is:

> A named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members (Smith, 1991: 14).

Nevertheless, Smith does not give a clear definition of national identity. Instead, he elaborates on the essence of national identity through discussing its roles and issues (Chang, 2012). According to Smith's definition of the nation, it is indicated that national identity has different aspects, and in case developed, it:

> Can never be reduced to a single element, even by particular factions of nationalists, nor can it be easily or swiftly induced in a population by artificial means (Smith, 1991: 14).

As multifunctionally powerful to individuals and groups, national identity functions both internally and externally. The internal functions focus on individual members of the state. As Smith (1991) claims, through education and media, individual members can be nurtured to identify themselves as "nationals and citizens" (Smith, 1991: 16). By instilling "national devotion and a distinctive, homogeneous culture", individuals can develop solid shared convictions in the "cultural authenticity and unity" of the nation (Chang, 2012: 6).

On the other hand, the external functions of national identity, are associated with factors such as politics and territory (Chang, 2012). According to Smith (1991), the political function of national identity is the most important, as it legitimates the common legal rights and obligations of legal institutions, defines values and characteristics specific to a nation, and reflects the ancient customs and morals of the people. Hence, a person's strong sense of national identity may indicate he or she has a relatively strong will to promote social cohesion, genuine belief in or pride in the nation's shared values and assets, and compliance with the nation's expectations of him or her in the

face of external threats and challenges, or even justify and/or defend their country from various aspects (Chang, 2012).

As aforementioned, Smith clearly elaborates the national identity. However, considering the special research background, thus, Guibernau's definition of national identity is more suitable. As she defines:

> National identity is a collective sentiment based upon the belief of belonging to the same nation and of sharing most of the attributes that make it distinct from other nations. National identity is a modern phenomenon of a fluid and dynamic nature. While consciousness of forming a nation may remain constant for long periods of time, the elements upon which such a feeling is based may vary (Guibernau, 2007: 11).

One of the most striking features from Guibernau's definition of national identity is national identity's fluid and dynamic nature, which suggests that even though the national identity may not be quickly and easily (re)shaped or developed, it is never going to stay the same (Chang, 2012). Nowadays, according to Guibernau (2007: 189), national identity is "simultaneously more solidly constructed by efficient strategies of nation-building and much more open to alien influences impossible to control and exclude from the national space". Against the backdrop, thus, examining national identity from today's viewpoint becomes a complex problem due to its dynamic nature. However, the concept of narrative identity from Wodak et al. (2009: 14) is suitable to provide a clear explanation to the dynamic nature of national identity. They claimed that:

> Narrative identity allows various, different, partly contradictory circumstances and experiences to be integrated into a coherent temporal structure, thus making it possible to sketch a person's identity against the background of a dynamic constancy model which does justice to the coherence of a human life. Thus, the concept of narrative identity can go beyond the one-sided model of an invariant, self-identical thing. It can take into account the idea that the Self can never be grasped without the Other, without change (Wodak et al., 2009: 14).

This concept of narrative identity mentions the interplay between Self and Other. That is, identities are not formed in isolation. Instead, interactions with others and how they perceived and responded to us significantly shaped our sense of Self. In addition, this statement offers a more flexible and comprehensive understanding of identity. It views identity as shaped by experiences, interactions, and reflections and acknowledges the significant role of change and interaction in our Self-identity. In addition to national identity, individual identity can also be analysed in terms of narrative (Martin, 1995;

Ricoeur, 1992; Wodak et al., 1999). Individuals may consider their identity 'in terms of the stories they experience or imagine' (Flowerdew, 2012: 26), because individuals are always parts of groups, a group identity can be 'construed in terms of a narrative, just like an individual's identity can' (Martin, 1995: 3).

Apart from identity, legitimacy (of the CCP) is another important research aspect of this thesis. Hence, in the next few sections, the researcher will focus and discuss the following issues:

(1). The notion of legitimacy from both the traditional and the Chinese context;

(2). The CCP's legitimacy crisis, since it is the sole ruling party in mainland China;

(3). At the same time, how the CCP utilises economic development to 'buy' legitimacy from the general public, and how nationalism has become an important pillar to deal with the CCP's legitimacy crisis.

2.2.4 Legitimacy of the CCP

Having discussed the notion of national identity, another important factor that affects domestic politics is the legitimacy of the ruler (i.e., the CCP). Legitimacy lies in the centre of both the 'history of political philosophy and contemporary Chinese politics' (Zeng, 2018: 56). In the field of political studies, legitimacy refers to the 'rightness of a state, which is more than just "legality"' (ibid). As Huntington (1993: 46) argues, the concept of legitimacy is "mushy", which suggests that one group of people might see a regime as a legitimate rule, while another might see it as oppressive or undemocratic. However, legitimacy is 'essential to understanding the problems confronting in authoritarian regimes' (Zeng, 2018: 56). As an authoritarian regime, the CCP does not derive legitimacy from elections or widespread public participation in governance, for example, social movements. Instead, it relies on delivering high-speed economic growth (see the latter for detailed discussion) and other coercive strategies (i.e., media control and censorship, see 2.3.4) to maintain its legitimacy. Understanding the nature and sources of the CCP's legitimacy is crucial, as it is beneficial for analysing its actions when facing potential challenges (i.e., the 2019 Hong Kong protests) or shifts in power dynamics.

As one of the fundamental elements of a regime, legitimacy refers to the willingness of citizens to comply with a system of rule (Gilley, 2009). The claim of legitimacy, through which the government rightfully demands obedience from its citizens, may be more important than obedience itself. Weber (1918) defined legitimacy as the recognition of and obedience to authority. Legitimacy can be distributed to three types of authority according to the sources upon which a regime bases its legitimacy: (1). Traditional authority, which is based on habit and history; (2). Charismatic authority, which is based on the "revelations, heroism, or other leadership qualities of an individual"; and (3). Legal rational authority, which is based on valid statutes enforced by technically trained civil servants (Huang and Pang, 2022: 973). Although Weber (1965 [1918]) defined a state as a community that successfully asserts the legitimate use of physical force in a given territory, physical force cannot be used as a source of legitimacy.

Weber's theory of legitimacy is a valuable framework for analysing the debates surrounding the Chinese government and society in China (Jung and Lee, 2016), as it helps the researcher understands the multifaceted nature of the CCP's authority and the sources of its legitimacy, gaining a deeper understanding of the complexities and nuances of Chinese governance and societal dynamics, also sheds light on the potential trajectories of political change in China. The traditional legitimacy of the Chinese government/the CCP is rooted in its long history and Confucian tradition, which emphasises the importance of authority and hierarchy (Wang, 2018). Confucianism has been an influential philosophy in China for centuries. Even today, his ideas have significantly impacted Chinese politics and the whole society. In terms of governing the country, Confucius put the establishment of social order in the first place, by 'correcting wrong wording of different social statuses so that everyone acts according to their own status' (cited from Chang, 2012: 35). Furthermore, Confucius's differentiation between the Han ("Chinese") and the non-Han people ("Yi", or barbarians) (Chang, 2012: 35-36) is commonly embraced as the foundation of Sino-centrism (see 2.2 for more details) and the cultivation of the Chinese cultural superiority (Terrill, 2003).

The charismatic legitimacy has been the foundation of the CCP for a long time, particularly during the era of Mao Zedong, whose personal charisma was a vital source of the CCP's legitimacy (Zeng, 2018). For example, in the mid-1960s, the CCP's various mouthpieces, such as the People's Daily, the Liberation Army Daily, and the Red Flag, published a series of articles titled: "To vigorously and particularly establish

the absolute authority of Chairman Mao and Mao Zedong Thought" (Zeng, 2018: 29). At that time, Chairman Mao Zedong was described as the great leader who led China to fight against imperialism and feudalism and established the new China (Zeng, 2018). Some propaganda even apotheosis Mao as "'the venerable, heavenly ruler' who was 'better than the Red sun' and 'more enduring than heaven'" (Zeng, 2018: 29-30). However, Mao's personal authority (i.e., charismatic legitimacy) was established at the cost of the authority of rules and laws (i.e., rational-legal legitimacy, see next paragraph). That is, Mao often used his charismatic legitimacy to violate established rules, procedures, and even decisions from the majority of the leadership, which seriously undermined the authority of the rational-legal procedures (Zeng, 2018: 30). However, Mao's long-term charismatic legitimacy is fragile and brought existential legitimacy crisis to the CCP after he died in 1976.

The rational-legal form of legitimacy grounds a belief in the "legality of patterns of normative rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands" (Zeng, 2018: 49), which is anchored in established laws, regulations, and procedures. Compared to traditional legitimacy (e.g., Confucianism) derives authority from traditions and customs, charismatic legitimacy arises from the charisma of an individual (e.g., Mao Zedong), the rational-legal legitimacy rooted in the society's laws and regulations (Zeng, 2018). Against this backdrop, rational-legal legitimacy is a cornerstone of modern governance and democratic countries, emphasising established laws, procedures, and bureaucratic structures. It highlights the importance of rule and law and procedural correctness in gaining and maintaining political authority. However, as mentioned above, due to China's traditional socio-political background in history and Mao's excessive charismatic legitimacy, there was little room left for the CCP to implement rational-legal legitimacy, although in recent years the CCP has tried to strengthen this type of legitimacy by promoting the rules and laws.

While Weber's theory was developed from the comparison of political systems in traditional societies, many scholars such as Fukuyama and Easton, have defined new forms of legitimacy appropriate for industrial and highly bureaucratic societies (Huang and Pang, 2022). In respect to the concept of political power, Scharpf (1988) and Schmidt (2013) categorised legitimacy as input, throughput, and output legitimacy (cited from Huang and Pang, 2022: 974). Input legitimacy emphasises political participation and claims that decisions should be made in a way that involves the people (Easton, 1965). In Chinese context, the People's Congress in China serves as

the organ of state power, theoretically providing legitimacy for the current regime (Huang and Pang, 2022: 975). In essence, governments at various levels ought to be chosen by the corresponding People's Congresses of that tier and should have identical terms of office (Huang and Pang, 2022). While the People's Congress is expected to consist of representatives chosen by registered citizens, the election law prohibits competitive elections even when it permits elections with multiple candidates (Xie, 2003). Additionally, even though the election law states that any adult can run for office if supported by 10 other adult voters, in fact, the CCP has largely taken control of the candidate nomination process (People's Congress, 2015).

The Political Consultative Conference (PCC) acts as an alternative mechanism to gain input legitimacy, especially when the People's Congress system falls short in its effectiveness. Typically, members of the PCC are influential citizens who are not part of the CCP. Furthermore, officials from the government often participate in these conferences. Chairs of these conferences are usually drawn from government councils of the respective levels. Initial appointments to the conference are made by the CCP, and subsequent nominations are made by existing conference members (Xie, 2003). Notably, the process of choosing conference members does not involve elections (Huang and Pang, 2022).

In practical terms, beyond the two aforementioned institutions, the CCP's Party Congress is the primary avenue for securing input legitimacy (Huang and Peng, 2022). This framework bestows legitimacy upon CCP leaders, who concurrently serve as government leaders. The Party Congress system acts as the cornerstone and starting point for the CCP regime's input legitimacy. Yet, similar to the People's Congress member elections, the Party Congress system lacks competitive elections (ibid). Instead, candidates for the Party Congress are proposed by existing party members for elections.

Following the three input legitimacy processes, the CCP Chairman serves as the 'direct source of the national government's legitimacy' (Huang and Peng, 2022: 974). The Chairman, acting as a significant component of the state power, is typically held by the top-ranking CCP member, specifically the Secretary-General. According to the Chinese Constitution, the Chairman is not just a position but an institutional representation of China, serving as the nation's leader and the upholder of its laws (Huang and Pang, 2022). While the 1982 Constitution suggests that any Chinese

individual over 45 can be the Chairman, however, the selection process is more intricate. The CCP's political bureau must nominate them first, following that, the central CCP approves the roster of Chairmanship contenders and the nation's supreme leaders. Only after endorsement by the People's Congress does the Chairman wield full authority. Once confirmed, this pivotal role then grants legitimacy to the national government formed under the Chairman's guidance (ibid).

The CCP officially defines its input legitimacy collecting system as unicameral, which means having a single legislative or parliamentary chamber (i.e., National People's Congress, NPC) which reviews, amends, and approves legislation. The CCP does not recognise the PCC as a Senate-like entity, given that the PCC's decisions lack legislative power when the People's Congress is in operation (Huang and Pang, 2022: 975). As illustrated in Figure 2-1 (referenced for the next page), the process and sequence of gathering input legitimacy deviates from traditional models. In the CCP's structure, the Party Congress convenes roughly six months prior to the PCC, and the People's Congress typically meets a few days after the PCC. The PCC reviews the decisions passed by the Party Congresses. Subsequently, the People's Congress gives its assent to the decisions that the Party Congress and PCC have revised and approved. Hence, the Party Congress is the primary source of input legitimacy, followed by the PCC, with the People's Congress having the least significance in this context (Huang and Pang, 2022).

Moreover, the foundation of the CCP regime's input legitimacy is not as general as modern democratic regimes (Shi, 2001). Indeed, the CCP regime first obtains input legitimacy from its party members, achieves the recognition of its authority from influential social groups, and then obtains national input legitimacy from the People's Congresses (Huang and Pang, 2022: 977). In an ideal modern model, the legitimacy of a party's governing power comes from the House of Commons and Senate. The dynamic of legitimacy in that model is distribution, but that dynamic is amplification in Chinese. Thus, while the legitimacy of the CCP regime is gradually amplified via this process, the amplified legitimacy is not as important as that based on relatively narrow sources.

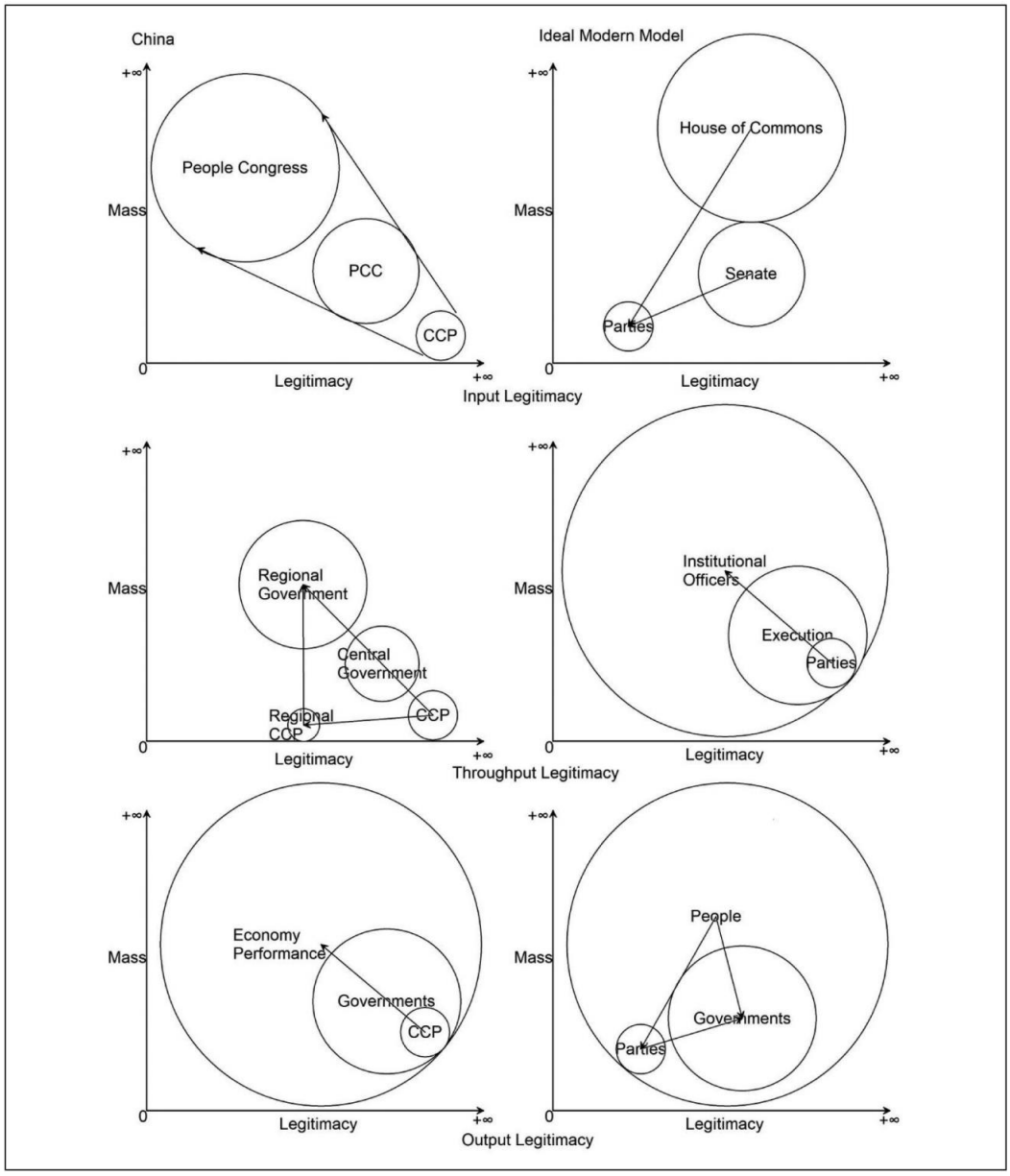

Figure 2-1 Comparison between the legitimacy-deriving system of the CCP regime and the theoretical modern democratic model. Notes: Each circle represents an organisation in China, and their locations on the graph represent their relationships. Arrows in the figure represent the dynamic of legitimacy from one organization to another. The sizes of circles represent the mass of each group. These graphs are made according to the concepts and theories expounded in the literature listed in the source. The graphs of the dynamic of legitimacy in the CCP regime from input to output are abstracted from the expansion of Xie (2003), and the ideal modern model has been based on Heywood's (2002) expounding. (Source: Huang and Pang, 2022: 976).

Throughput legitimacy focuses on the political processes that shape how decisions are made, including both broad considerations, such as the political system, and the specific reporting procedures of government sub-committees (Schmidt, 2013). In the progress of throughput legitimacy, the CCP regime adopts a dual-distribution mechanism. Governments on all levels are supposed to be nominated by the predetermined highest leaders at the same levels; both nomination and the predetermined highest leaders should be approved by the CCP congresses and the People's Congresses at the same levels. Although the throughput legitimacy of governments has been distributed by the highest leaders, this distribution should be acknowledged by the legitimacy input systems.

Following the same order through which the CCP regime achieves input legitimacy but from an institutional perspective, the central and regionally central CCP distributes legitimacy to its governments after completing the collection of input legitimacy at all levels. Functional departments then share the legitimacy distributed to the central governments at their levels. With regard to personnel: the legitimacy of the CCP first distributes legal authority to party leaders; governmental leaders, who are also CCP members, then receive their positional authority; finally, ordinary civil servants share in the legitimacy of the institutions they represent (Huang and Pang, 2022: 977).

In order to assure the realisation of the goals of input legitimacy, the CCP regime ensures that higher authorities be the only resources by which subordinates gain legitimacy. However, the regional CCP groups can supply partial legitimacy to regional governments. Unlike the CCP's grand unification in both national and regional governance of the mainland of China, in an ideal modern model, parties in power would distribute legitimacy to executive sectors and the officers in positions at their governing levels. Parties that win the election at a governing level are the only resource for the executive sector at that governing level to obtain legitimacy. In comparison to the ideal modern model (Figure 2-1), Chinese local governments have two sources - namely, the national CCP and regional CCP groups - through which to gain legitimacy. They also have to follow the lead of both the national CCP and regional CCP groups (Heywood, 2002). The hierarchical system headed by the CCP guarantees the efficient operation of throughput legitimacy (Huang and Pang, 2022: 977)

In contrast to input legitimacy, output legitimacy emphasises that the legitimacy of a state is determined by policy performance and the citizens receiving a certain number

of services and benefits from the state (Peters, 2011). Compared to the modern democratic model, the CCP regime cares more about its own interests. People's contentment is the most important thing in order to get output legitimacy; meanwhile, governments also have a great impact on parties' output legitimacy in an ideal modern model (Huang and Pang, 2022: 977). However, the realisation of the CCP's aims is always the first priority and the output legitimacy achieved from this is of paramount importance to the CCP regime. In order to derive output legitimacy from the CCP, both institutions and officers who share legitimacy prioritise the realisation of the CCP's aims and policies. Their second priority is government interests, especially those of superiors and important actors on the same level (Huang and Pang, 2022: 978). Their third priority is economic development. Expressed by GDP, economic development has been used as the only unalterable quota that can be publicly checked and compared in order for governments and leaders to derive output legitimacy. Meanwhile, the CCP regime officially expounds its appreciation of the GDP as a means of deriving output legitimacy from the people (Yu and Zhang, 2011). While the CCP regime appreciates the output legitimacy derived from the CCP, it has gradually started to believe that economic benefits can help it win output legitimacy from Chinese citizens.

To summarise, while the CCP regime wants to use economic benefits in exchange for citizens' recognition of its legitimacy, the legitimacy derived from the general masses (i.e., public's support) is of lesser concern to the CCP. What the CCP cares more about, is the legitimacy derived from the smaller social groups that control relatively more political, economic, and social resources. Compared to the modern democratic model, the design of the legitimacy derivation system significantly favours the ability of small groups to manipulate the Chinese political system. It also recognises that the legitimacy of the CCP regime is not as general as that of a modern democratic polity. This design was created by the CCP's first leadership generation centred by Mao Zedong, which decided the way in which the CCP would derive and express legitimacy. Although the operational principles of this legitimacy derivation system have been modified by different generations of leadership, this design of a legitimacy -deriving system has become the tradition of the CCP regime (Huang and Pang, 2022: 978).

2.2.5 The CCP's Legitimacy Crisis

Mao Zedong's death is the most significant political event in examining the modification of the CCP's regime. Although some studies tend to use the end of Cultural Revolution or the Tiananmen massacre as turning points (Meisner, 1999). Mao's death is a better turning point through which to investigate the changes in government legitimacy because it fundamentally altered the source of the CCP's legitimacy. It is agreed that the CCP regime was totalitarian before Mao Zedong's death (Zhang, 2010b), and connect the regime's legitimacy to Mao's personal charisma (Robinson, 1988; Teiwes, 1984). In studies on legitimacy after Mao's death, researchers often equate government credit with legitimacy and argue that economic development is the main source of the CCP's ability to maintain its legitimacy (Norris, 2011; Pei, 2012; Wang, 2006). These studies indicate that the CCP's legitimacy often tend to connect factors such as ideology and economic performance, instead of authentic rational-legal because the level of benefits citizens receive from the government can influence their levels of support to the regime. A regime that brings more benefits and services to its citizens will enjoy higher legitimacy (Bovens and Wille, 2008; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008).

During Mao's rule, the CCP had highly substantive and positive legitimacy with efficient output based on charismatic legitimacy derived from Mao Zedong's personality cult. After Mao's death, the CCP has tried to achieve developmental results - although it does sometimes break regime rules. For example, Deng Xiaoping initiated the attempt to strengthen the legitimacy of the CCP by good governance that promised to bring prosperity to China (i.e., Reform and Opening Up policy, see 2.2.2), since he obtained leadership by coup. Then, the Deng Xiaoping-centred leadership generation gradually reactivated non-competitive election to go from both in and out of the CCP to derive only pro forma rational-legal legitimacy; this legitimacy is negative and instrumental, and predominantly efficient in its throughput process (Huang and Pang, 2022: 980).

The leadership generations centred by Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao mainly followed the way started by Deng Xiaoping. Jiang Zemin relied more on good governance (i.e., Three represents), while Hu Jintao, often considered as a 'weak' leader who does not have control over different factions within the party, tried to bring substantive and traditional legitimacy by emphasising the heritage of the CCP and promoting Chinese traditional culture (i.e., Scientific Outlook on Development and Harmonious Socialist Society). According to Weber's legitimacy theory, traditional culture is one significant source of institutions legitimisation, while social stability is another essential element of government performance. For example, Shue (2004) claims that the CCP "stakes"

its legitimacy on its ability to maintain social stability (cited from Zeng, 2018: 52). However, the concept of stability in the Chinese context is about economic growth but not political reform. It aligns quite well with neoliberal discourse in the West, although it specifically justifies the Party-state polity.

2.2.6 Nationalism as a Pillar of the CCP's Legitimacy

The suppression of the 1989 Tiananmen demonstrations and the subsequent Soviet Union disintegration were crucial moments to China (Tok, 2010), marking a serious crisis legitimacy of the CCP. To maintain its legitimacy, during the post-Tiananmen period, different CCP's leadership generations focused on economic growth and improvement in ordinary people's livelihood and achieved significant success (see 2.2.2). However, although economic growth matters, the declining faith in socialism taught the CCP that the official doctrine of 'Marxism-Leninism was no longer effective in mobilising loyalty and legitimating the state' (Ma, 2015: 205). The CCP also realised that it 'should base itself firmly on Chinese nationalism' - the only important value shared by the regime and its people (Zhao, 2000: 17-18). Hence, nationalism has become an indispensable cornerstone of the CCP's legitimacy. After reviewing relevant literature, I argue that the following reasons may partly explain:

(1). Historical reason: The CCP was founded during the time when China was experiencing the so-called 'Century of Humiliation', with multiple Western countries exerting control or influence over parts of the country. The Party positioned itself as the force that would restore Chinese glorious past and maintain China's powerful status in the world;

(2). Unification reason: As a country which has a vast and diverse population and with numerous ethnicities and cultures, Nationalism as a cohesive glue in China can unite various groups of people under the Chinese national identity banner;

(3). Ideology reason: With the reduction of pure Marxist-Leninist ideologies as a source of legitimacy (see above), especially after implementing the Reform and Opening Up policy in 1978, socialism with Chinese characteristics (see 2.2.2) is gradually integrated into the capitalist mechanism. Against this backdrop, the ideological void has troubled the Party and finally led the CCP to turn to nationalism, which seems a suitable source of cohesion to fill this ideological void;

(4). External reason: By emphasising national pride and sovereignty, and territorial integrity, the CCP can frame external criticisms or interference as direct attacks on China's national dignity, which can effectively transfer the public's eyes and rally domestic support against perceived external threats (e.g., the 2019 Hong Kong protests);

(5). Economic reason: China's rapid economic growth and increasing international influence in recent years have increased Chinese people's national pride. Against this backdrop, the CCP often framed this success as a national resurgence after centuries of stagnation and humiliation, making nationalism intertwined with the narrative of China's rise;

(6). Territorial reason: Territory disputes such as with Xinjiang, Tibet and Taiwan are often framed in nationalist narratives. By emphasising the importance of territorial unity and integrity, the CCP legitimises its policies (i.e., national assimilation in Xinjiang and Tibet) in these regions and rallies the broader Chinese population against any social movements that against the CCP's dominance;

(7). Legitimacy reason: As aforementioned, the CCP sought to rebuild its legitimacy after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Yet, compared to the democratic nations, the CCP's legitimacy does not come from fair political activities such as elections or ballots. Instead, the CCP, combined with delivering high-speed economic growth and nationalism, unified the general public in China and infused their loyalty to the Party.

(8). Anti-Westernisation reason: Accompanied by the Reform and Opening Up, different kinds of Western political and cultural influences influx into China, which caused the CCP fears these factors might weaken its control over the whole society. Hence, by emphasising a unique Chinese national identity and civilisation superiority, the Party can neutralise Western influences and present its governance model as an alternative to Western liberal systems.

However, although nationalism has become a significant pillar of the CCP's legitimacy, it is a relatively new term for China, which did not exist until China considered itself a country due to it was forcibly opened the gate by Western imperialism in the twentieth century (Ma, 2015). Since nationalism was introduced in China, it is always a question of 'political renovation for nation-building' (Lin, 2006: 35). However, the concept of 'Chinese nationalism' conveys different meanings compared to traditional nationalism.

It can be translated as *aiguo zhuyi* in China, which generally means 'loving the state' (Zhao, 1998) and suggests 'loyalty to geographically unified and ethnically diversified China' (Motyl, 2001: 84). Nevertheless, it is nearly impossible to give a precise definition of Chinese nationalism (Ma, 2015). On the one hand, according to Conversi (1995: 77), the nation is itself a tool of definition; on the other hand, it is 'situational' (Zhao, 2004: 19) since Chinese nationalism sometimes has different focuses and agendas, and different nationalist actors may define nationalism differently according to their own political considerations (Ma, 2015).

However, the question of whether the strong loyalty to the Chinese nation is to be understood as patriotism or nationalism is still debated (Sinkkonen, 2013). In Chinese, loyalty to and love for China is most often referred to as patriotism, *aiguo zhuyi* (literally: love-country-ism). The word for nationalism, *minzu zhuyi*, (literally: ethnic-group-ism) is often used to refer to right-wing populist movements in Europe, but not to loyalty to China. As Fewsmith (2016) pointed out, there is no denying the widespread patriotic feelings of the Chinese people. Yet, patriotism is a 'two-edged sword, providing support for the government but also holding up a standard that is perhaps impossible for the government to attain' (Fewsmith, 2016: 105-107).

The uniqueness of nationalism, especially online nationalism in China, has drawn much attention in recent years (see Wang, 2012; Weiss, 2014). Considering the Internet has been highly controlled and censored by the CCP (see 2.3), it is odd to see the official sometimes tolerates extreme statements and sentiments expression and permits netizens to express nationalist perspectives and construct a nationalistic discourse. According to Steen (2013), nationalism is an important part of the CCP's legitimisation strategy and consequently plays a significant part in Chinese political discourse, in education and other forms of cultural expression. Hence, it is undeniable the relationship between the CCP and Chinese nationalism. More importantly, Chinese nationalism does not happen without its foundation. Instead, it is the CCP who subtly manipulated the Chinese narrative and incited nationalism if it is needed.

In the meantime, the CCP carefully manoeuvred Chinese nationalist sentiment, although it needed nationalism to help 'set the national agenda to suit the party' (He and Guo, 2000: 30). According to Kristof (2001), nationalism can give the government legitimacy or take it away. And the CCP is clearly aware that either suppressing or encouraging popular nationalism could backfire (Ma, 2015), which means if the CCP

tries to tame nationalism by using strong means, its nationalist narrative will face serious doubt and thus 'causes the party to lose face and authority before the Chinese people' (Gries, 2005a: 181; cited from Ma, 2015: 206). On the other hand, if the CCP's nationalist rhetoric is soft, the rise of popular nationalism may become uncontrollable, potentially affecting the social stability and economic prosperity that the CCP promises to deliver (Ma, 2015). However, by reiterating the handover of Hong Kong in 1997 and Macau in 1999 and hosting the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games, the CCP trying to promote 'confident nationalism' (Oksenberg, 1986: 501-23) in recent years. Confident nationalism is a type of nationalism which is assertive, self-assured, and often outward facing (Oksenberg, 1986). It is characterised by a strong belief that a nation is superior, righteous, or has a destined place in the world. Such a form of nationalism often emerges from a country experiencing a period of rapid economic growth or resurgence on the global stage. By doing this, the CCP attempted to convince the Chinese general public that only under the central leadership of the Party, China could restore its past glory of the Chinese nation and overcome the 'Century of Humiliation' (Gries, 2004 and 2005b: 251-6; cited from Ma, 2015: 206).

Recently, through an applied dialectical-relational approach, Peng and Sun (2022) analysed anti-trans sentiments posts posted on a Chinese social media platform (i.e., Hupu), indicating that Chinese social media users have created distinctly negative nomination (e.g., white leftists) to stereotype and criticise Western progressive and left-leaning politics. This kind of negative portrayal aligns with the nationalist sentiments of pro-state supporters in China, manifest as their reaction against the Western-centric globalisation from the Sinocentric lens amid 'China's return to the central stage of the world in the post-reform era' (cited from Peng and Sun, 2022: 6). Peng and Sun (2022) also claim that the nomination strategy confirms the impact of Chinese government's post-reform propaganda efforts, on the one hand, this strategy emphasises domestic politics harmony as a way to 'conceal China's internal structural issues' (Peng and Sun, 2022: 6), meanwhile, the CCP engineered the population's support for the regime by applying hawkish/wolf warrior public diplomacy, to challenge the Western-led international order and confront the US-led alliances international geopolitics (Schneider, 2018).

However, considering China's mysterious media operational system and severe suppression of freedom of speech, it is weird to imagine how different types of nationalist rhetoric is propagated to the Chinese general public. To answer this

question, examining and providing a detailed introduction and explanation of Chinese media systems is vital, as the Chinese media plays a significant role in disseminating news information and propagating CCP's ideologies to Chinese people. Against this backdrop, in the next few sections I will emphasis on and introduce the following perspectives:

(1). The media system in China - including both state media and social media;

(2). Chinese state media control and logics of Chinese state media and the 2019 Hong Kong protests;

(3). Chinese social media censorship;

(4). How the Chinese general public counterflow/circumvent social media censorship;

(5). How Chinese media serves the CCP's propaganda in the world.

2.3 The Media System in China

As Zhao et al. suggested, compared to its function as a "watchdog" in liberal democratic countries, the media is becoming a propaganda machine in China (Zhao, 1998; He, 2008; Young, 2013). However, since China implemented the Reform and Opening Up policy, the function of Chinese media has changed. Thus, it may undoubtedly be oversimplified to claim the Chinese media to pure 'propaganda' (Liu, 2020). Nevertheless, considering the research background of this thesis includes analysing Chinese media discourses of the 2019 Hong Kong protests; hence, it is vital to investigate and discuss Chinese media systems first, which include state media and social media.

2.3.1 What is Chinese State Media?

In China, many scholars use the term "state media" but not give a clear definition. Some emphasise its special relations with the CCP, and/or owned by the CCP (Nyíri, 2006: 88; Kennedy, 2009: 533; Shirk, 2010: 5, 105), while others imply that the state media are those under strict control (Lee et al., 2006: 582; Qiang, 2011: 49). Those who give a clear definition of state media, for instance, Peng and Winfield (2005: 261) claim that the state media is 'a media organisation directly owned and operated by the government at the central level'. Their definition of state media is adopted in this thesis,

that is, those (media) are owned by the state and/or the CCP, in addition to circulating nationwide (Liu, 2019). Based on this definition, state media in China thus including the People's Daily and its subordinate publications (e.g., the Global Times, although it is more market-oriented), Xinhua News Agency, the China Daily, etc.

As aforementioned, the state media organisation is directly owned and managed by the CCP. Thus, they directly represented the CCP, which was the single and unique ruling party of China since 1949. The role of the state media to the CCP often surpasses everything else (Liu, 2019). For example, in order to easily coordinated by the CCP, state media's structure is similar to government organisations, and their products are usually propagandistic, doctrinaire and pedantic (Liu, 2019: 47). Against this backdrop, their relationship with the public is mainly top-down and unidirectional. According to Liu (2019), Chinese state media has gone through a cycle of 'expansion and proliferation to restriction and reduction'. Those media outlets which were preserved through the turmoil were the most important to the Party on the one hand, also the most successfully adapting to the swiftly evolving political and economic landscape on the other hand (Liu, 2019: 48).

Since the late 1970s, Chinese state media has experienced a new wave of progression of commercialisation (Fang, 2020). At that time, in addition to governmental assistance, advertising both from home and abroad has become the most crucial financial support for the majority of Chinese media (Zhao, 1998). However, until the 1990s, advertising rates in China were among the lowest in the world (Liu, 2019). This drew a lot of attention from global commercial companies (e.g., Casio, Hitachi, Toyota from Japan, Coca-Cola and IBM from the United States, etc.) and their funding driven the prosperity of China's media industry. According to Chan (1993: 25), the year 1992 will be remembered as the year of commercialisation. At that time, Deng Xiaoping toured the south of China many times and delivered several speeches in support of reform (Liu, 2019) and eventually let the CCP re-focused on further economic reform and development after the backlash of the Tiananmen Square massacre (Fewsmith, 2008). Since that time, businesses have sponsored media outlets or support specific columns. In 1995, more than 2000 newspapers in China sold 72 million copies a day. Concurrently, state-affiliated outlets such as the Xinhua News Agency function similarly to large business conglomerates, releasing a plethora of daily, weekly and monthly publications (Liu, 2019). In a similar vein, the People's Daily, during the 1990s,

had five subsidiary publications, with four of them bearing more resemblance to commercial newspapers than traditional Party journalism (Zhao, 1998).

2.3.2 State Media Control

While freedom of the media is often regarded as a cornerstone of democracy, media control is an 'indispensable part of an autocratic system' (Qin et al., 2018: 2442). Economists have shown that the political bias of media has important consequences in autocracies, such as (1). the negative social effects of propaganda; (2). the significant impact of media freedom on corruption; and (3). regime support (Qin et al., 2018). The CCP as a single and dominant party in the Chinese government, realised the importance of media control as early as the 1920s, hence declaring that the Party's central executive committee must manage journals, daily publications, books and booklets and no publications, whether from central or local, should feature any content that contradicts the Party's principles, policies or decisions (Tong and Cheng, 1993). Since that time, in order to implement the Party's principles, the CCP does not hesitate to 'assert its control over the media' (Liu, 2019: 50). Later, Mao Zedong further strengthened this concept and elaborated on the functions of the media: disseminating Party's policies from the centre to the localities, educating, organising and mobilising the publics (Bishop, 1989).

After Mao's death, the relationship between state media and the CCP is that the latter adopted centralised control over the former, which has existed for 'more than half a century since the Central Propaganda Department (CPD) became the headquarters of China's national propaganda system' (Tong, 2010: 925). The CPD, which represents the CCP's viewpoint, oversees the entire propaganda system, gives instructions, and supervises the cultural production of the Chinese society (Brady, 2006; cited from Tong, 2010: 925) to guarantee that the entire society speaks with the same voice. More specifically, the CPD sets rules for Chinese state media propaganda by specifying what news can be reported, at the same time, the CPD always putting national interests above all other issues (Brady, 2006; He, 2004). Against this backdrop, it is suggested that instead of an absolute media organisation, Chinese state media has actually become an indispensable part of the CCP's political and propaganda system. Therefore, journalists are more likely to play roles such as government personnel, who enjoy the prestige bestowed by the system, and express the party's line instead of

voicing their own ideas (De Burgh, 2003a; Hong, 1998; Zhao, 1998; cited from Tong, 2010: 927). In other words, instead of reporting the latest events, Chinese state media 'facilitates everything that the CCP is trying to promote' (Liu, 2019: 50). In addition, the state apparatus ensured legal consequences for those who fail to adhere to these principles (Hong, 1998; Huang, 2006). However, all these control rules can be modified or overturned as the CCP deems appropriate. Hence, rules often change frequently (Liu, 2019).

Even experiencing twenty years of economic and media reform (i.e., media marketisation), state media control is still seen as a persistent monopoly and centralised by the CCP (Sparks, 2008; cited from Tong, 2010: 927), which means the Party still holds a monopoly over media content and directly order what topics should be covered, in order to disseminate its ideology according to the political tasks of the time among the populace. Besides, by banning specific politically dangerous topics, the CCP justifies its governance and prevents dissent. Stimulated by investigative journalism, the rise of the liberal tendency is believed to reflect the needs of the elite class, but only within the party line's orbit (Zhao, 2000; cited from Tong, 2010: 927). At the same time, market-inspired journalistic professional identities are also shaped by persistent political authoritarianism (De Burgh, 2003b).

Since the late 1990s, there has been a false marketisation of Chinese media, with large media conglomerates flourishing under administrative orders rather than genuinely driven by marketisation (Sparks, 2008). Against this backdrop, false marketisation has led to the concentration of economic and symbolic power in the hands of a small elite, whose continued dominance of the Chinese media system further impedes the liberal functioning of the market (ibid). According to Tong and Sparks (2009), as a genre that is most likely to inspire liberal ideas in Chinese society, investigative journalism is considered to be diminishing in the 21st century due to economic paradoxes and political risks. That is to say, the media is not only controlled by politics but also by the party-market alliance initiated by the ruling party (Lee et al., 2006).

Given such situations, the party-state's control over the media is 'dominant and exclusive' for three reasons (Tong, 2010: 927). The first is a continuing belief in the importance of political power in China's modernisation process (Tong, 2010). According to Gries and Rosen (2004), authoritarian leadership has long been recognised as helpful in solving social problems and promoting social development.

This widespread belief in the importance of the party-state power is ‘an extension of the pre-totalitarian state control thesis that the state should control all aspects of society’ (Tong, 2010: 928).

The second reason is that the principle of national propaganda still follows the classic Marxism with Chinese characteristics; that is, the state media should play the role of a channel for the core ideologies of the ruling elite (Tong, 2010). This means that the party’s attitude towards state media remains unchanged, which prevents the party from giving up its control of the media. According to Liu Yunshan, a former director of the CPD, explained in the CCP’s theoretical publication *Seeking Truth* magazine, the importance of propaganda requires the party-state to ‘have a firm grasp of what the Chinese media can do and should do’ (Tong, 2010: 928).

The last reason is despite the commercialisation of the media, the nature of the Chinese propaganda system has not changed (Zhang, 1993). The CPD continues to play a significant role in guiding ideology and overseeing Chinese society as a whole (Tong, 2010: 928). The CPD issues propaganda instructions to its local branches and Chinese media (Brady, 2006), which the media needs to ‘follow and implement to serve the national interest’ (Tong, 2010: 928). However, the frequent political suppression of Chinese state media figures in recent years have alarmed the Chinese media, suggesting that the CCP’s centralised control of media will continue and be even harsher (Fang, 2020).

Nevertheless, even though the CCP is considered quite repressive, however, only those issues considered harmful to the state legitimacy and sensitive to governments nationwide were censored by the CPD (Liebman, 2011; Zhao, 2000). Kuang (2014) claims that how the sensitive news issue is framed is believed to be affected by two factors, the geographical relevance of the sensitive news issue, and its political control. Previous studies also suggest that media frames are aligned with the government’s position (Luther and Zhou, 2005), which indicates that the way media in China presents news and events tends to mirror the official views, policies, or narratives of the CCP. Instead of offering diverse or critical perspectives, the media’s framing of events has to support or reinforce the government’s stance. In addition, Chinese media frames are also varied based on the media type (i.e., party and non-party). Although all news organisations are owned by the CCP, party outlets are still less commercialised than their counterparts (i.e., non-party) because of their differences on content, political

status and circulation (Huang, 2001; Wei, 1999; cited from Kuang and Wei, 2018: 1439). The content of the party publications focuses on policies and party guidance, whereas non-party publications emphasise materials that resonate with the general public (Shao, 2002). In terms of political status, due to party outlets consistently represent the official stance and policies of the CCP, thus, they have higher political status compared to non-party outlets, which take more focus on the market (Fang, 2022). Regarding circulation, most party outlets depend on state mandatory subscriptions, while non-party outlets rely on market circulation (Huang, 2001; Shao, 2002).

However, when it comes to framing national sensitive issues, the Chinese news organisations use very similar frames no matter they belong to the party or not. But when it comes to framing local sensitive issues, they may use different framing strategy (Kuang and Wei, 2018). Thus, although media marketisation has given way to the emergence and growth of non-party news organisations and expand the reporting boundaries of the media, these media organisations still do not have guaranteed press freedom, as freedom of the press is only allowed for 'politically safe' and 'socially useful' news genres in China (Lee, 2000).

For example, as Zhang and Fleming (2005) claim, the CCP have three effective ways to control the newspaper coverage of sensitive issues: (1) appointing the editors-in-chief at the respective newspapers by the propaganda department; (2) issuing directives or circulars at different levels by the propaganda department; (3) disseminating direct instructions at certain meetings by top officials (cited from Kuang and Wei, 2018: 1437). However, according to news issue and news organisation, the degree of control implemented by the CCP may be different. On the one hand, propaganda authorities (i.e., national/local levels) only issue directives on news which are sensitive to the CCP's legitimacy and/or government performance at certain levels (Liebman, 2011; Zhao, 2000; cited from Kuang and Wei, 2018: 1436). On the other hand, despite the fact that the editors-in-chief of the respective newspapers are appointed by the propaganda department, some, that is, non-party news outlets, are 'given more autonomy on the coverage of some news issues' (Stockmann, 2013: 30 - 31; cited from Kuang and Wei, 2018: 1438).

Another way the CCP to control media framing of the sensitive issue, is to request news organisations only use news articles published by official news agencies (i.e.,

Xinhua News Agency, the People's Daily, etc.) when they want to report the same issue, which is the so-called 'trans-printing' (Kuang and Wei, 2018). For example, the Xinhua News Agency serves as the locus of central communications of the Chinese party-state and follows the CCP's guidelines (Feng et al., 2012; Ma, 2005; Wu, 2006), has the freedom to decide how much trans-printing text from the official source they would like to use in the news (Kuang and Wei, 2018). However, non-party media outlets are restricted from adding new information to the story and are mandated to reproduce the information presented in the original news. In other words, all news organisations would use similar frames when they report nationally sensitive issues (Kuang and Wei, 2018). This corresponds to the aforementioned Luther and Zhou's (2005) finding, which suggests that when reporting issues with considerable political risks, Chinese news organisations tend to use a very similar framing strategy. Thus, these news media, no matter what type (i.e., party/non-party) they belong to, are all expected to serve as the mouthpieces of the CCP when this situation happens (Kuang and Wei, 2018).

Chinese state media's control and centralisation have intensified and strengthened since Xi assumed leadership in 2012 (Ringen, 2017), which is consistent with Xi's broader agenda to consolidate power and ensure ideological loyalty to the CCP. Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a global non-profit organisation that promotes and defends freedom of the press and the right to inform and be informed anywhere in the world, has described Xi as 'the planet's leading censor and press freedom predator', which the organisation warned that not only is media freedom being curtailed within China's borders, but China is also attempting to redefine the norms of what constitutes of free and open reporting on the global scale. This viewpoint is also proved by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which mentioned that the Chinese government policies are aimed at 'achieving complete hegemony over news coverage and the creation of an international media order heavily influenced by China' (BBC, 2022: para 3).

Under Xi's rule, the CCP has consistently warned against the infiltration of Western values and has increasingly crackdown on these values, such as 'pluralism, regulatory impartiality and free expression' (Creemers, 2015: 48) in different aspects of China such as academia and media. For example, the CCP secretly replaced the editorial team of Yanhuang Chunqiu, a pro-liberal magazine which endured for a quarter of the century with the backing of a group of liberal CCP elites (Liu, 2019). Under this severe

circumstance, there has been a noticeable reduction in media content that could be seen as promoting the Western style of democracy, freedom or values. Instead, the CCP propagates the so-called ‘positive energy’ narrative, encouraging the dissemination of the ‘positive energy’ content across media platforms that align with socialist core values, highlighting economic achievements, scientific advancements, and stories that showcase the unity and strength of the Chinese people. In 2016, during his visits to three main Communist Party news outlets in China - Xinhua News Agency, the People’s Daily and China Central Television (CCTV), Xi reiterated that ‘all party media must surname the party’ (The Guardian, 2016), emphasising the need for strict adherence of state media to the CCP’s line. By doing this, Xi further strengthened his grip over the Chinese media and led to an exacerbated environment of media ecology in China.

2.3.3 Chinese State Media and the 2019 Hong Kong Protests

In an authoritarian regime such as China, state-run media acts as a relatively inexpensive instrument for the autocrat (i.e., the CCP) to dictate and manage the flow and framing of information (Ma and Weiss, 2023). The availability of information influences how dissenters gauge the risks of resistance (ibid). According to Edmond (2013), individuals who have a comprehensive grasp of the regime’s power are less inclined to engage in activities opposing to the regime. In turn, autocrats may leverage media to emphasise or amplify its perceived ability to govern and maintain societal order, intending to deter potential revolts. Also, instead of reshaping citizens’ perspectives on the appropriateness of dissent, mechanisms such as censorship and propaganda act as indicators of the state’s strength and deter individuals from becoming aware of anti-regime movements (Guriev and Treisman, 2020; Huang, 2015; Little, 2016). Beyond merely restricting the influx of democratic ideologies or diverting public attention with other topics, state media directives may also serve to inhibit opposition and perpetuate autocratic rule by simultaneously highlighting the efficacy of suppression alongside the benefits of cooperating with the system (Stockmann and Gallagher, 2011).

In particular to the CCP, its efforts to combat and resist social movement are no longer a new story. In terms of the 2019 Hong Kong protests, the Chinese state media took several strategic approaches to mitigate their effect when the protests gained

momentum in June 2019, and these approaches have significantly influenced both the official narrative and public perception of the protests. These approaches can be concluded as follows:

(1). Depicting the protestors as ‘rioters’ or ‘radicals’: Instead of presenting the broad and diverse background of participants in the protests, Chinese state media often characterised them as violent radicals, sometimes even nominated them as ‘terrorists’, which aims to depict the protests as lost their nature, from peaceful social movement to dangerous unrest (Ma and Weiss, 2023);

(2). Under-reporting the scale of protests: The state media framed the protests as launched by marginal protestors in society. Witnessing the limited impact of protests elsewhere, dissenters may become less optimistic about the possibility of promoting democratic change via contentious action. At the same time, concerns about the difficulty of avoiding state punishment may grow as the number of activists shrinks (Huang and Cruz, 2021);

(3). Selective coverage of the protests: At the beginning of the protests, there was limited coverage on Chinese state media (Ma and Weiss, 2023). However, as the protests gained momentum, it became difficult to ignore the scale and effect. Against this backdrop, the state media’s narrative shifted but still refrained from deeply examining the root reasons (e.g., concerns about eroding Hong Kong’s freedom and high autonomy) for the protests. Instead, the state media often downplayed or ignored the large and peaceful rallies and police excessive actions (i.e., the use of damaging weapons to disperse the protesters) but exaggerated the protesters’ violent actions or disruption to society. Also, TV interviews, newspaper articles, comments and editorials predominantly featured voices that were inclined to the CCP’s perspective of the protests and heavily condemned the protestors;

(4). Highlighting economic costs: The state media focused on the economic damage caused by the protests, such as disruptions to businesses, decline in tourism and implications to Hong Kong’s reputation as an international financial centre, aiming at shaping a narrative that the protests rather than any other political agendas, were the primary threat to Hong Kong’s stability and prosperity;

(5). Focusing on foreign influence: The Chinese state media often suggested that the protests were instigated or heavily manipulated by Western forces, particularly the

United States and the United Kingdom. This narrative serves to delegitimise the protestors' demands by portraying them as not genuinely concerned about local issues but instead working as puppets of foreign forces (Ma and Weiss, 2023).

To sum up, these approaches from the state media can be understood within a broader framework of how an authoritarian regime such as the CCP controls and manipulates narratives when facing sensitive political matters to ensure that the public perception always aligns with state interests. In the case of the 2019 Hong Kong protests, the aim of the CCP was to shape a narrative that defended China's stance and upheld the CCP's broad interests in social stability, territory and sovereignty integrity, hence, legitimised Self and delegitimised Other (i.e., the protests/protestors).

2.3.4 Chinese social media: An Introduction

Meanwhile, the information explosion and technological advancement gave birth to new media in China. Its growth accelerated from 1993, at that time, the Chinese government decided to advance internet technology (Shirk, 2011). The spread of electronic devices such as mobile phones and computers has 'facilitated more comprehensive access to the internet and social media' (Liu, 2019: 60). At the same time, the internet was growing and expanding exponentially in China (Qiu, 2003). In 2008, China has surpassed the United States and became the country which has the most internet users (i.e. 298 million) in the world (Willnat et al., 2015). Furthermore, the China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC) reported that by the end of 2013, the number of internet users in China was 618 million, accounting for 45.8 per cent of the total population of China (CNNIC, 1998, 2013 and 2014). In 2018, the scale of Chinese netizens further reached around 802 million (Deng, 2018).

New media, especially social media, has become ubiquitous and transformative in contemporary China (deLisle, Goldstein and Yang, 2016), and the rise of the internet and social media reflects the partial liberalisation of China's political climate. In his landmark book (i.e., The Power of the Internet in China), Yang (2009: 217) claims that the Internet has fostered the 'emergency of a citizen's discourse space' in China. He suggests that 'nowhere else do Chinese citizens participate more actively and directly in communication about public affairs, nowhere else are so many social issues brought into public discussion on a daily basis' (Yang, 2009: 217-8). In addition, Yang also states that the internet has created a group of 'fearless, informed, impassioned, and

not easily deceived' Chinese netizens (Yang, 2009: 218). Although much attention focused on social media's importance for ordinary citizens to express opinions and share information, social media has also changed how the Chinese authorities communicate with the people they rule. For example, China's Party-state media (i.e., People's Daily, the CCTV, Xinhua News Agency) invested significant sums in the development of the internet and social media, and all have an online version nowadays.

Even though the commonly recognised trio of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, which dominates the international social media landscape, does not pertain to China (as all of them are not available due to the Great Firewall, GFW, built since mid-2009), the Chinese internet users have a wide array of alternative local platforms at their disposal, many of which are specially designed for the domestic audience (Sullivan, 2014). According to Sullivan (2014: 29), these services are 'privately owned platforms subject to government regulation'. Among them, Microblogging (or Weibo in its Chinese name) in recent years has become the most widely used and fastest-growing Web 2.0 application in China (Willnat et al., 2015). For instance, CNNIC (2014) claims from 2010 to 2013, the number of Chinese micro-bloggers increased from 63 million to an astounding 281 million, accounting for nearly half of the nation's internet users (Willnat et al., 2015). The proportionate increase in Weibo users has prompted academics to claim that China is in the era of the 'Weibo revolution' (Yang, 2011; Hu, 2010). The zealousness of this new media platform is probably because of some posts and/or content on Weibo that are unavailable or prohibited to report in Chinese state media (i.e., because of the state media control, see 2.3.4), thus making the platform (i.e., Weibo) a crucial space for new sources expression and discussion (Sullivan, 2012). Hence, although Weibo is still under close surveillance from the Chinese government, it has become a significant channel of public opinion and an alternative news source that often rivals the official propaganda of Chinese mainstream media (Hu, 2010; Jiang, 2010b; Yang, 2009; Zheng, 2008).

The popularity of Weibo in China 'can be partly explained by their Twitter-like function, their ability to allow relatively free discussions online, and the way most people access to them' (Willnat et al., 2015: 187). Sina Weibo, launched in 2010 as a Twitter clone but with an elite orientation (Willnat et al., 2015), which means the platform caters primarily to the specific group of influential, well-educated users with significant social or professional status instead of entirely targeting the broad population. This strategy helped Sina Weibo quickly gain credibility and differentiate itself from other social

media platforms. By doing this, the platform attracts a large number of ordinary users engaging with or following the content produced by those elite members and interacting with them simultaneously. According to Willnat et al. (2015), the total number of users of Sina Weibo was more than 500 million, and daily active users were about 54 million in 2014.

In terms of functions, Sina Weibo has the same compared to Twitter, such as '140-character limit for posts and a one-way organisational structure for followers who choose to access other users' posts' (Gao et al. 2012: 88-101). Unlike English, whose 140-character limit requires conciseness, the use of Chinese characters lets users write 'nuanced messages and include ideas from other contributors in their own messages, making it easier to follow and participate in online conversations' (Sullivan, 2014: 25). Compared to those using Twitter, Chinese Weibo users mainly use the platform to read news and information, watch videos, or have more interactive conversations and long-chain discussions on specific topics with social contacts (Willnat et al, 2015).

In addition to Weibo, Weixin (or WeChat) is currently another mainstream social media platform in China. "WeChat, a new lifestyle," is the slogan of WeChat. WeChat stormed China when it was launched in 2011. At that time, some online commentators described it as a "better WhatsApp crossed with the social features of Facebook, and Instagram, mixed with Skype and a walkie-talkie" (cited from Tu, 2016: 344). In December 2019, WeChat reported more than 1.1 billion monthly active users and became China's leading social media application (Tai and Fu, 2020). As a comprehensive, integrated application, WeChat combines essential online functions such as private messaging, group chat, online gaming, e-payment, and blogging; it also offers "public accounts" (or "official accounts") to which users can subscribe (Tai and Fu, 2020: 845). Similarly to Facebook Pages, WeChat public accounts are accessible to the public and can be used by companies, organisations, media outlets, celebrities and individuals to broadcast media content and interact with target users; while users will receive push notifications when the new messages, articles, pictures or videos are published by the public accounts they followed (Tai and Fu, 2020). Unlike Weibo, which allows a large-scale information forum for brewing national debates and discussions that opinion leaders mostly dominate, WeChat is built on comparatively closed personal networks. The private self-centred WeChat network provides a

‘comfortable, honest, and equal space for individuals to express themselves, where a plurality of interests can be represented and coexist’ (Tu, 2016: 345).

2.3.5 Chinese social media and Government Censorship

Social media in China appears as vibrant and extensive as in any Western country, with over 1,300 social media companies and websites, millions of posts are authored daily by people across the country (Brady, 2009; Cairns and Carlson, 2016; Knockel et al., 2015; MacKinnon, 2012; Ng, 2015; Shirk, 2011; Stockmann, 2013; Stockmann and Gallagher, 2011; Yang, 2009, cited from King et al., 2017: 484). However, in contrast to Western social media platforms, which experience less governmental oversight and pressure, Wallis (2011: 406-436) asserts that Chinese social media has evolved into ‘an active realm for public discussion, information dissemination, and mobilisation in ways that are both sanctioned and discouraged by the government’ (Wallis, 2011: 419, cited from Willnat et al., 2015: 184). On the one hand, Wallis highlights the significant influence of social media on Chinese society. On the other, he points to the government’s vigilance regarding its (i.e., social media) potential to challenge the CCP’s dominance. As a result, the CCP has imposed extensive and varied censorship across the social media landscape to ensure the Party’s control and societal stability.

Censorship is one of the major ways in which powerful people and organisations suppress and control information. Although many non-democratic regimes still use physical coercion to punish online dissenters, new tools of digital repression have been widely employed by the authoritarian regimes where the institutions of checks and balances are weak, to enhance the state’s control over cyberspace (Boxell and Steinert-Threlkeld, 2021). Authoritarian states have widely imposed censorship on media content through official guidance, supervised by state apparatus, and strengthened by the states’ provision of infrastructure, information, and financial support (Richter, 2008). This strategy has been adapted to the digital age in China. According to King et al. (2013), the size and sophistication of the government’s programme to selectively censor the expressed views of the Chinese people is unprecedented in recorded world history, with ‘more than hundred thousand of police and agents were specialised in online information control’ (King et al., 2013: 1). Obviously, manually filtering online content is laborious, expensive, and time-

consuming, but it remains a key censorship measure in China (King et al., 2013). While censorship on Chinese social media platforms has significantly intensified in recent years, astute Chinese netizens have employed a variety of sophisticated strategies to circumvent automated filtering and restrictions (see 2.3.5 for detailed discussion).

In China, the internet content provider take much responsibility for censorship, and if they do not follow government censorship guidelines, they can be fined or even shut down by the official (King et al., 2013). However, according to King et al. (2013), the purpose of censorship in China is not to suppress criticism of the state or the CCP; instead, it is primarily designated to diminish the chances of collective action by severing social connections whenever signs of group movements emerge or are anticipated (King et al., 2013: 1). For example, the internet and social media platforms allow citizens to voice their discontent and highlight illicit or egregious actions by the CCP cadres, businesses, or other entities. Such expressions are often uncensored, potentially serving as a 'safety valve' to diffuse public frustrations and alert authorities to issues that could jeopardise stability (Teon, 2019). As such, this "loosening up on the constraints on public expression may, at the same time, be an effective governmental tool in learning how to satisfy, and ultimately mollify, the masses" (King et al., 2013: 14).

Since Xi Jinping became the CCP's Secretary General in 2012, Chinese media ecology has become more rigid than previous, with more adaptive and dynamic in censoring media content. As Lorentzen (2014) suggests, the Chinese government deployed approaches of strategic censorship, believing that content regulation is not just a fixed set of rules, but may be loosened at times and then tightened based on social tensions and public opinion (Chen and Xu, 2017; cite from Tai and Fu, 2020: 843). For instance, during the 2012 Diaoyu island/Senkaku (Japanese name of Diaoyu island) island crisis, online nationalist posts were not uniformly allowed or censored (Cairns and Carlson, 2016; cite from Tai and Fu, 2020: 843), and even the posts in terms of pro-regime nationalist viewpoints or cheerleading for China were sometimes censored by the authorities (Zhang et al., 2018). Besides, King et al. (2017) note that the Chinese government at all levels (i.e., central, provincial, and local) has long been suspected of hiring as many as 2 million people (the so-called "50 cent party", wumao dang) as they are rumoured to be paid 50 cents (5 jiao, 角, or about $0.08) to 'surreptitiously fabricate' and post about 448 million social media comments a year, as if 'they were the genuine opinions of ordinary people' (King et al., 2017: 484). In

contrast to their prior claims in 2013, which they suggested that the CCP's censorship strategy has changed from "reduce the probability of collective action" to "avoid arguing with sceptics of the party and the government, and not to even to discuss controversial issues, such as the revolutionary history of the CCP, or other symbols of the regime" (King et al., 2017: 484-5), nowadays, the goal of censorship in China has changed the subject, aiming to distract the public (King et al., 2017).

The same claims have been revealed by Tai and Fu (2020), as they state that the CCP generally does not censor massive collective action posts at all, and the tolerance level of the CCP in terms of the press and public expression could 'wax and wane over time and across (virtual) spaces' (Tai and Fu, 2020: 843), suggesting that the CCP's approach to censorship is not monolithic or absolute. Instead, the CCP's level of tolerance regarding media and public expression can fluctuate based on timing and context and might vary across different social media platforms. In other words, the CCP may take a more nuanced approach than a strictly uniform or unchanging strategy to controlling public discourse.

2.3.6 Censorship and Grassroots Counterflows

As stated previously (see 2.3.3), social media censorship has become more rigid and become a new normal since Xi Jinping took power in 2012. However, the big data era has posed new challenges to the conventional state-centred censorship approach. With the exponential data growth, the officials and their hired swords can only monitor part of cyberspace. Shrewd internet users can use creative wordplay or virtual private networks (VPN) to evade censorship and surveillance (Gu, 2014), dragging the state into a cat-and-mouse game. However, authoritarian states have incorporated new actors into their information control actions to react to these challenges. Digital platforms, media companies, and individual users are encouraged to participate in mass surveillance and directly or indirectly contribute to censorship (Gallagher and Miller, 2021; Hassid, 2020), for which extensive participation and collaborations of non-state actors are indispensable. Despite the importance of non-state actors (e.g., private companies, individual users) in the censorship system, the main body of literature still takes a state-centred approach, regarding the authority (e.g., government officials or contractors) as the default actor who sets rules for and execute censorship (Luo and Li, 2022).

However, the ambiguity of censorship rules in China (as discussed in 2.3.4) often leads individual users to speculate about these rules, which in turn influences their online behaviour. Luo and Li (2022) observe that many individuals, when confronted with uncertain censorship, turn to online communities to 'exchange political rumours, clarify censorship standards, and develop strategies to evade censorship' (Schimpfössl and Yablokov, 2020; Svensson, 2012; Xu, 2015; cited from Luo and Li, 2022: 4). Within these communities, members remind each other to be cautious about potential censorable social media posts. Some even seek advice on whether they should delete their posts due to perceived sensitivities (Luo and Li, 2022). These self-regulating behaviours are not mandated but are viewed by members as essential for the community's preservation (ibid).

At the same time, as recent studies by Zhu and Fu (2021) suggest, while peer support can provide a buffer against the fear induced by censorship, it also diminishes the negative emotions a victim of censorship might experience, decreasing their likelihood to resist. This is because on occasion, the online community itself may even play a role in censorship. Such communities sometimes act as vehicles for self-censorship, although members might steer clear of controversial topics and moderators may delete content considered divisive or counter to the group's standards. However, in some cases, community members themselves may point out or report perceived 'violations', hence, effectively facilitating the censorship process.

Contrary to conventional wisdom, which assumes that strict censorship reduces access to information, Hobbs (2018) argues that such actions expand access to information to a given subset of the population, a phenomenon known as 'information compensation' in authoritarian regimes (Hobbs, 2018: 620). That is, the government first imposes censorship, and citizens are then accustomed to finding ways to acquire such information by inventing ways of censorship evasion. The created tools for evasion provide 'continued access to information that may be newly blocked and extend citizens' ability to access information which may have long been censored' (Hobbs, 2018: 621), which indicates that the act of censorship in authoritarian regimes may lead to an unintended and paradoxical effect. Instead of entirely stifling access to information, this censorship can lead to the specific population becoming more resourceful and informed as they seek ways to bypass those restrictions.

Corresponding to Hobbs's claims, Chinese grassroots netizens have adopted several counterflows tactics in order to circumvent the perpetuated social media censorship in China. For example, they use VPN to break through the Great Fire Wall (GFW) and browse the prohibited Western media websites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In addition, they use analogies, metaphors and other evasions to 'confront the keyword blocking, which stops a user from posting text that contain banned words or phrases' (King et al., 2013: 3). For example, the Chinese language offers novel evasions, such as substituting characters for those banned with others that 'have unrelated meanings but sound alike (i.e., homophones) or look similar (i.e., homographs)' (ibid). An example of a homograph is 目田, which has the nonsensical literal meaning of "eye field" but is used by World of Warcraft players to substitute for the banned but similarly shaped 自由 which means freedom. In terms of a homophone, the sound "hexie" is often written as 河蟹, which means "river crab," but is used to refer to 和谐, which is the official state policy of a "harmonious society" (King et al., 2013: 4).

Considering Chinese internet servers' response to political criticism very quickly, thus Chinese netizens have created other tactics, such as '*egao*', to circumvent censorship from the official (Willnat et al., 2015). *Egao,* is a term which can be loosely translated as 'reckless or malicious actions', are spoofs based on audio, visual or text, which are posted online by a grassroots subculture that takes serious issues and entertains with subversive comedic effects, often in the style of parody or satire (Huang, 2006; Meng, 2011: 33-51; Zhang, 2010; cited from Willnat et al., 2015: 191). Gong and Yang (2010: 16) claim that *egao* 'plays with authority, deconstructs orthodox seriousness, and offers comic criticism and relief. It provides imagined empowerment for the digital generation, exploring an alternative space for the individual expression' (cited from Willnat et al., 2015: 191). When new public issues occur, new *egao* content as a type of symbolic resistance, is created and distributed online which attracting more public attention than state media reporting (Zhang, 2010).

Social media platforms in China, notably Weibo and WeChat, have significantly amplified the dissemination of *egao* culture. These platforms not only facilitate the rapid virality of specific parodies or memes but also play a pivotal role in expanding the influence and potency of *egao* (Willnat et al., 2015). Given this, by 'translating official content into personal expression, citizens can engage in digital dialogue with entities that previously monopolised communication channels through political and economic

means' (Meng, 2011: 33-51), which suggests that by using *egao*, ordinary people are not just passively consuming media content. Instead, they actively respond to it and engage in a two-way conversation with those entities, commenting or even challenging the official's narrative. In contrast to Western versions of mashups, *egao* are often spontaneous, grassroots products uploaded by anonymous users in China in scattered locations on the internet and social networks (Zhang, 2010). According to Meng (2011), while *egao* might not directly result in organised political movements, however, they play a significant role in political communication and are beneficial to maintain dialogues on commonly concerned issues beyond citizens' private lives, which showcase the democratising potential of social media, allowing individuals to have their voice out and dialogue with traditionally powerful communication gatekeepers such as traditional media (e.g., TV, newspapers, etc.).

Simultaneously, it is imperative to acknowledge the stringent oversight exerted by the CCP over prominent social media platforms such as Weibo and WeChat. Thus, in order to circumvent potential sanctions from the propaganda apparatus, these platforms frequently resort to pre-emptive content moderation, effectively practising self-censorship by excising content that could be perceived as challenging to the official narrative or stance. This dynamic presents a compelling dichotomy; on the one hand, these platforms are the primary venues for creating and disseminating *egao*. On the other hand, they are also becoming the place where such content (i.e., *egao*) is frequently and swiftly censored and expunged.

2.3.7 New Media Technologies and the 2019 Hong Kong Protests

Nowadays, more and more digital and social media technologies have been used by protest activists. For instance, during the Arab Spring in 2010 and Occupy Wall Street in 2011, protestors effectively applied these technologies to 'rally the public, deliver information and organise actions' (Fang, 2023: 4), and the 2019 Hong Kong protests are no exception. Amid this backdrop, it is argued that digital media technologies, such as mobile live streaming (hereafter MLS; for the brief introduction between MLS and the protests, please see 1.1) and other social media platforms, have become indispensable to contemporary social movements (Fang, 2023).

As previously stated (for more details, please see 1.1 and 1.3), the 2019 Hong Kong protests have become an ideological battleground involving various groups. Essentially,

the protests per se represent a direct conflict between protestors and the police. Concurrently, the media technologies mentioned above, which carry conflicting and sometimes contradictory discourses and narratives, have formed an implicit battleground between supporters and opponents of the protests. Considering Hong Kong's long history of social movements (for more details, please see 1.2), digital technologies applications such as the messaging app Telegram and online forum LIHKG (similar to Reddit in the West) have been broadly utilised in previous demonstrations, e.g., the 2014 Umbrella Movement. However, the dynamic relations between MLS and the protests have yet to be discovered.

During the 2019 Hong Kong protests, the protesters adopted highly fluid strategies, such as being leaderless and not having fixed protest sites, to resist and evade police repression. As a result, traditional methods of documenting the protesters' actions proved challenging (Fang, 2023). However, the immediacy, liveness, and embodied/embedded perspective of MLS made it the best media technology and the most important information channel for Hong Kongers to capture and follow the dynamic nature of protests (Fang, 2023: 3). Interestingly, as an emerging media technology, MLS served as a significant tool not only for the protestors to achieve their overall aims but also for those opposing the protests to express their support for the Hong Kong government. Given this, it is argued that the actual scope of the 2019 Hong Kong protests might be much larger than we could see on the streets (Fang, 2023).

On the other hand, considering severe media censorship and surveillance, Chinese social media, combined with the state media, also played a significant role in framing the state-sanctioned narrative of the 2019 Hong Kong protests (for more details, please see 2.3.3 and 2.3.5). For example, there was an amplification of nationalist propaganda on Chinese social media platforms when the protests gained momentum in the second half of 2019. To use Peng's (2022) words, 'the internet has become a significant space for the practice of populist nationalism in China' (Peng, 2022: 281). This claim corresponds to Schneider's (2018) assertation, which states that online expression of nationalist sentiments in China is not only evident on its prominent social media platforms, e.g., Weibo and WeChat, but also appears on nearly every other Chinese social media website, such as Douban (a social networking service that focuses on movies, books, music, and also has forums where users can discuss various topics); Zhihu (a renowned Q&A platform in China, similar to Quora); Baidu

Tieba (a widespread forum-based platform under the umbrella of a Chinese searching engine company, Baidu).

Despite the CCP's strict censorship of Chinese social media, these platforms have evolved as spaces where more pluralistic and critical discourses can emerge and spread. Fang and Repnikova (2018) note the potential for such platforms to facilitate digital civic engagement in China. Yet, digital nationalism also grapples with the opposing 'forces of globalisation, cosmopolitanism, and China's intricate history and culture' (Fang and Repnikova, 2018: 5). Participants in these digital nationalist discourses range from government-employed commentators to self-organised grassroots internet users. Nevertheless, the emergence of digital nationalism presents a 'double-edged sword' of the CCP, which not only fuels support for the regime, but may also turn against it if and when the government 'fails to meet the radical demands of nationalistic voices' (Fang and Repnikova, 2018: 2, 163).

In the midst of the 2019 Hong Kong protests, the nationalist propaganda magnified on Chinese social media has far-reaching implications. For instance, narratives on Weibo and WeChat frequently portrayed the protests as a consequence of Western interference (i.e., the United States and the United Kingdom). This narrative conveniently aligned with the overarching theme of digital nationalism, wherein the Western nations are often represented as the 'black hands', interfering in Chinese internal affairs and working against Chinese interests. Against this backdrop, the protests became a battleground of ideologies not just between Hong Kong and China, but also between the East and the West.

Also, this digital framing of the 2019 Hong Kong protests as part of the East vs West ideological conflict was not an isolated incident. Instead, it reflects a more profound, ongoing trend in Chinese social media. That is, the efficacy of these platforms in mobilising and steering public opinion became starkly evident when a crisis happened. For example, when an image of protestors waving the American flag appeared online, it was often selectively amplified by the Chinese social media, to propagate the narrative of foreign influence and interference. Such portrayals not only delegitimised the protestors' demands in the Chinese general public eyes but also strengthened the nationalistic sentiment that Hong Kong needs to be protected from Western influences.

During the protests, social media platforms in China not only reflect but also shape, influence and amplify the broader geopolitical narratives. The phenomenon of 'echo

chambers' (see 6.2.1) became conspicuous as these platforms were dominated by nationalistic posts, overshadowing any dissenting voices or alternative viewpoints regarding the roots and context of the Hong Kong protests. This consistent narrative not only reinforced the CCP's portrayal of the protests but also ensured that most Chinese citizens remained congruent with the state's narrative. In addition, the divisive 'Us vs Them' narrative (i.e., We are doing right, they are doing wrong) reached its peak during this period. For instance, Chinese social media overflowed with contrasts between Hong Kong's chaos and China's stability, with frequent insinuations that the former's unrest was the consequence of its pursuit of Western-style democracy and freedom. Furthermore, whenever foreign politicians or celebrities publicly endorsed the protests, the anti-China agenda among Western democracies flooded on these platforms, and this digital nationalism sentiment subtly shifted the perception and narrative of the protests. Amid this backdrop, the nature of the protests was not just about Hong Kong's quest for democracy, freedom and autonomy; instead, it became emblematic of the larger East vs West ideological conflict, a representation facilitated and perpetuated by digital and social media.

In conclusion, the interplay between Chinese social media and the 2019 Hong Kong protests provides invaluable insights into the shifting dynamics of digital nationalism in contemporary times. The future of Chinese social media will likely see more entanglements between public sentiments, state control, and geopolitical manoeuvring, making it a pivotal area of study in understanding both Chinese and global narratives.

2.3.8 The Role of Chinese Media in the Dissemination of CCP Propaganda

As mentioned before (see 2.3.5 and 2.3.6), the CCP tightly controlled and censored the Chinese state and social media. According to Xu (2020), the CCP propaganda organs have employed more nuanced strategies, such as increasing media censorship to empower the Party's authority and maintain support from the public. At the same time, it strategically uses Chinese media to propagate information such as why we must uphold Party's leadership and the socialist system in China, and ignite nationalism when confronting external crisis (i.e., the 2019 Hong Kong protests) which may lead to identity and legitimacy crises on the other hand. More specifically, the state media is involved in broadcasting manipulated politicised content by the CCP and censored any information which questioned the Party's rule and political legitimacy; while on social media platforms, the CCP deliberately disseminate disinformation and

fake news to ignite nationalism, hence facilitate Chinese national identity construction and legitimate itself. Although authoritarian regime suffers from weak legitimacy can be resolved by nationalism, and nationalism is the pillar of CCP's legitimacy (see 2.2.7), the upsurge of nationalism from online spheres has potentially impacted the CCP hegemony. For example, in case of the ruling party fail to fulfil public nationalistic interests, it may facilitate public criticism and even lead to social mobilisation against the CCP.

In addition to domestic, the CCP has expanded investment in state-run outlets in order to influence more international audiences over the past few years (Cook, 2022). For instance, key outlets such as China Global Television Network (CGTN), China Radio International (CRI), and the China Daily (CD) are now directly disseminating news and information via TV, radio broadcasting, newspapers and online platforms around the world. Chinese officials refer to such techniques as 'borrowing the boat to reach the sea' (Cook, 2022: para 9), which is an idiom from China, suggesting a strategy of using someone else's resource or platform to achieve their own goals. In terms of Chinese media, the Chinese government uses the international version of these media outlets at times, conveying its perspectives to international audiences, especially when trying to shape global opinion on contentious issues (e.g., territory/human rights issues). However, considering the CCP's severe control over state media in China, the first priority of these outlets is the content must closely align with the CCP's preferred narrative rather than fact-based reporting; thus, it inevitably leads to subjectivity or bias (Cook, 2022). Against this backdrop, the CCP could subtly infuse its ideologies and propagates twisted narratives into daily news sources to reach foreign audiences.

On the other hand, the CCP also enlarged Chinese state media's influence by setting up accounts on popular Western social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, although these platforms were blocked and unavailable in mainland China. According to Cook (2022), Chinese state media accounts such as the People's Daily (PD), the Xinhua news agency, and CGTN have multiple language choices and garnered tens of millions of followers on the aforementioned Western social media platforms. In comparison, media investigations have found that several Chinese government bodies paid millions of dollars to private companies to create fake accounts on Western social media, which then pushed out positive content of China/the CCP to the overseas followers or direct them to click the state-linked accounts on the one hand (Xiao et al., 2021; cited from Cook, 2022). At the same time,

the CCP also used these fake accounts to launch disinformation campaigns and propagate disinformation on global media platforms, aiming to distort public discourse and challenge fact-based news reporting around the world (Cook, 2022).

2.4 Hong Kong and Mainland China

As a former British colony and now a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China, Hong Kong is geographically located in the southern part of China with approximately seven million people (Flowerdew, 2012). It consists of three distinct parts: Hong Kong Island, the Kowloon peninsula and the New Territories (Flowerdew, 2012: 2). The first part was perpetually ceded to the British in 1842; the second part was ceded to the British in 1860, while the last one, according to the terms of a 99-year lease agreed with China, was under British rule in 1898. However, although the three parts of Hong Kong were taken over by the British due to China's defeat in the Sino-British wars, the legitimacy of Britain's sovereignty in Hong Kong has constantly been challenged from the Chinese side (Flowerdew, 2012). Nevertheless, apart from stating that '[t]he Hong Kong issue should be resolved through negotiation when conditions permit' and that 'the existing status of Hong Kong should be maintained pending a solution', China never took any concrete steps to retrieve control of Hong Kong (Flowerdew, 2012: 3).

Negotiations between Britain and China started in the early 1980s in terms of Hong Kong's future and the approaching of the lease expiry (i.e., in 1997) on the New Territories (Flowerdew, 2012). These negotiations reached the agreement (i.e., Sino-British Joint Declaration) in 1984, which indicated that Hong Kong would be handover to China and become a SAR of the country on 1st July 1997 (ibid). At the same time, China also published the Basic Law, which is a mini constitution for the post-handover Hong Kong based on the Joint Declaration. According to the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law, Hong Kong would retain a high degree of autonomy under Chinese sovereignty and that its way of life, including its capitalist economic system, its common-law legal system, its free press, its freedom of worship, its right of assembly, its academic freedom and its two official languages (Chinese and English) would remain the same for 50 years following the change of sovereignty (Flowerdew, 2012: 3).

According to the declaration, China would implement the "One country, Two systems" (OCTS) principle, which is a 'national unification policy developed by then Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s' (Maizland, 2022: para 3). The principle aims to

help integrate Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau with sovereign China while ‘preserving their unique political and economic systems’ (Hung, 2023: 107). The Sino-British Joint declaration and Hong Kong’s Basic Law, the city’s constitutional document, enshrine the city’s ‘capitalist system and way of life’ and grant it ‘a high degree of autonomy’, including executive, legislative, and independent judicial powers for fifty years until 2047 (Maizland, 2022: para 4). The specific text in Joint Declaration mentions:

> The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) will be directly under the authority of the Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China. The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) will enjoy a high degree of autonomy, except in foreign and defence affairs which are the responsibilities of the Central People's Government (Sino-British Joint Declaration, 1984).

The quotation highlights that the OCTS principle will be applied to the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) after its handover from British to China in 1997 and confirms the sovereignty of mainland China over Hong Kong. Although Hong Kong maintains a distinct legal and administrative system from China, its ultimate authority is the Chinese central government. The OCTS was devised to reconcile the vast system differences between China and Hong Kong on the one hand and try to maintain stability and prosperity in Hong Kong after its handover on the other hand.

Although this clause points out that Hong Kong was promised a high degree of autonomy, such as the laws implemented during the British colonial period would remain unchanged after the region’s handover to China as a SAR, and protect “freedom of speech, freedom of the press and publication; freedom of association, of assembly, of the procession and demonstration; and the right and freedom to form and join trade unions, and to strike” (The Basic Law, 1990; cited from Sykes, 2020: 70), it remains under control of the Chinese central government, which means the CCP is able to wield greater influence through loyalists who dominate the Hong Kong’s political sphere than the SAR government (Maizland, 2022). To some extent, the ambiguity term of “enjoy a high degree of autonomy” in Hong Kong is a main factor that caused social movements in Hong Kong in recent years (i.e., The Umbrella Movement in 2014, which requested for universal suffrage, and the 2019 Hong Kong protests for anti-extradition bill).

Hong Kong is described as a ‘meeting of East and West, based on the traditional Chinese heritage of its inhabitants and the influence of British colonialism and international capitalism’ (Flowerdew, 2012: 6). Since its handover, Hong Kong has

become an important centre for China's trade, finance and investment. In terms of elections, pro-democracy parties together with pro-Beijing parties constitute the LegCo, which makes sure the government usually gets what it wants. In the few cases where it failed to do so, the Hong Kong government has called on the Chinese central government to impose relevant policies. Although the majority of Hong Kongers bored and rejected political control from China, in the meantime, they embraced China as the motherland of culture and heritage (Flowerdew, 2012).

2.4.1 Hong Kong's Identity

Flowerdew (2012) claims that the identity in Hong Kong has been problematic for a long time, especially considering Hong Kong experienced radical political change (i.e., the change of sovereignty from Britain to China in 1997). Ma and Fung (1999: 199) suggest that Hong Kong's identity development has followed an 'erratic path', which corresponds to Martin's (1995: 3) claim that identity has 'nothing to do with homogeneity and permanence' (cited from Flowerdew, 2012: 28). Even though the majority (i.e., 95 per cent) of Hong Kong's population is ethnic Chinese, most of them came to Hong Kong from the mainland either to escape the CCP's rule or are the offspring of these people (Flowerdew, 2012). According to Ma and Fung (1999), the colonial policy created space for the creation of Hong Kong's local identity by minimising contact with China, so it can be said that cultural differences between Hong Kong and China determined Hong Kong's identity. Compared with the 'less civilised' mainland Chinese people, Hong Kongers traditionally see themselves as Westernised and sophisticated (Ma and Fung, 1999).

So far, Hong Kongers have been reluctant to label themselves as 'Chinese' in opinion polls, even though Hong Kong as a former British colony, is now a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China. Instead, they are willing to call themselves 'Hong Kongers' or (to a lesser extent) 'Hong Kong Chinese' (Flowerdew, 2012). As previously mentioned, identity is multifaceted, and there seems to be three salient identity dimensions in terms of Hong Kong people, namely ethnic identity, cultural identity and political identity. For instance, based on the three dimensions, it has different meanings when a Hong Konger says he or she is Chinese. According to the first dimension (i.e., ethnic identity), it is unlikely for Hong Kong people to deny that they are 'Chinese' from an ethnic perspective (Flowerdew, 2012: 10). Nevertheless, from the political dimension, because Hong Kongers do not want to link themselves

with the Chinese government/the CCP, thus they might suggest that they are not 'Chinese' from this perspective (Flowerdew, 2012). In addition, from the cultural identity perspective, Hong Kongers might not wish to be seen as 'Chinese' although they share the same cultural values with China (Ma and Fung, 1999).

2.4.2 Contemporary Relations between Hong Kong and China

As mentioned in 2.4.1, China promised to preserve Hong Kong's unique status and high autonomy (i.e., the capitalist system and many freedoms not fully achieved in China) for 50 years when Hong Kong was handed over in 1997 (Maizland, 2022). To some extent, Hong Kong has had certain freedoms since its handover. However, considering China is a one-party state, it is unwilling to allow free and fair elections of the Chief Executive (CE) in Hong Kong, which is the head of the SAR government. Given this, the CE is chosen by an election committee made up of representatives of Hong Kong's key professional and business elite (Hung, 2023). Although the Basic Law stipulates that the ultimate aim is to have the leader of Hong Kong elected by universal suffrage, it does not give a timeframe for achieving this goal. Hence, Hong Kong has never been admitted as a fully democratic society by the international community.

Nevertheless, China has been working hard to limit the already limited voting rights of Hong Kong residents. For instance, it overhauled the electoral system in 2021, ruled that only "patriots" who "respect" the CCP can run in elections, hence making it easier for pro-Beijing candidates to be appointed as the Chief Executives and the LegCo members (Maizland, 2022: para 9). Against this backdrop, thus, only one candidate (i.e., John Lee) was allowed to run in the 2022 Chief Executive election. In case of the LegCo, on the other hand, half of the body's seventy members were elected by direct voting, while the rest were chosen by groups representing different industries and professions until 2021 (Hung, 2023). However, at present there are only twenty directly elected members and seventy are chosen (Maizland, 2022). In response to these changes, pro-democracy groups boycotted the 2021 LegCo elections, with all seats falling to pro-Beijing individuals.

Moreover, the 2019 Hong Kong protests have finally culminated in Beijing taking increasingly blatant steps to violate Hong Kong's political system and suppress dissent (Maizland, 2022). On 30th June 2020, Beijing imposed a sweeping NSL on Hong Kong,

which effectively criminalises any dissent and adopts extremely broad definitions of crimes such as terrorism, subversion, secession, and collusion with foreign powers on the one hand, and allows Beijing to establish a security force in Hong Kong and influence the selection of judges who hear national security cases on the other hand (for more discussions of the NSL, please see 7.3). Since the implementation of the NSL, the CCP has used the law to stamp out all forms of political opposition; for example, they disqualified pro-democracy candidates and ousted elected lawmakers who spoke out against China's control of Hong Kong (Maizland, 2022). In the meantime, Hong Kong police have arrested dozens of people under the law, including prominent pro-democracy activists, former lawmakers, journalists, and thousands more people who participated in the 2019 Hong Kong protests. In addition, Beijing has also curbed media freedoms in Hong Kong by closing pro-democracy publications such as the Apple Daily newspaper and harassing its journalists, and jailing the founder, Jimmy Lai (Hung, 2023). Although these moves generated a chilling effect on Hong Kong's society, which generally ended massive public protests and silenced the voices of many Hong Kong residents fighting for democracy, however, they have drawn international condemnation and called into question Hong Kong's status as an international financial centre, and also cast shadows on Hong Kong's future.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed and introduced several concepts such as China's socio-political background, national identity, legitimacy and its crisis of the CCP, the Chinese media system and the relations between Hong Kong and China since the former's handover in 1997. Undeniably, as an authoritarian country, China has achieved substantial economic achievements due to its reform and opening up policy under the rule of the CCP. However, economic development does not bring a stable environment for construct a unified national identity and hence the political legitimate of the CCP is still in crisis. Thus, the CCP utilised nationalism as a pillar of its legitimacy.

In terms of Chinese media, state media enjoyed some extents of freedom in the early times, but its development has generally fluctuated. The Tiananmen massacre in 1989 caused the CCP to understand that they must maintain the one-party state with public support and manage a balance between allowing and limiting public opinion expression (Brady, 2008). After this incident, the CCP changed its policy to refocus on economic development; hence Chinese state media experienced a golden era during

the 1990s with booming development and appeared some market-oriented media such as The Global Times and The Southern Weekend. Nevertheless, the fundamental role of state media as the mouthpiece of the CCP has never changed in China, especially since Xi Jinping took power in 2012, the media ecology in China has toughened and worsened.

Apart from the state media, with the development of the internet, social media has become a pervasive and transformative force in modern China (deLisle, Goldstein and Yang, 2016). Based on the CCP's manipulation and propagation, social media platforms sometimes become the 'relief valve' for netizens to express their emotions of patriotism and nationalism, hence legitimate the CCP and delegitimate other. Furthermore, the CCP's efforts to censor social media have been far more robust. These have been part of an all-encompassing strategy to reassert the Party's stringent control over media in all forms. In order to circumvent social media censorship, more and more netizens have found some tricky ways, such as using VPN to break through the GFW and homophones and homographs to counterflow censorship.

The tumultuous history of Hong Kong and its identity changes is an important consideration underlying the background of the 2019 Hong Kong protests. As Stroup (2022) suggested, Hong Kong's separation from China massively impacted the political relations between the two. Significant cultural, ideological and economic differences made the Hong Kongers shape their unique identity due to the British long-lasting socio-political effect on the region. Hong Kong became a capitalist hub with the Westernised political and legal system under British rule, while the CCP metamorphosised China into a socialist state, practising core values associated with Marxism-Leninism and socialism with Chinese characteristics at the same time. Prior to the handover to China in 1997, the OCTS policy ensured and guaranteed that Hong Kong would retain its continuous political, economic, and legal systems and enjoy a high degree of autonomy for the next fifty years until 2047. However, recently the region has become a significant contentious battleground, as the Chinese government/the CCP has implemented more centralised policies to tighten the control of the SAR government and further eroded Hong Kong's political and media freedom, which caused Hong Kongers to believe that their high degree of autonomy is under threat (Sykes, 2020). Therefore, they had to adopt a more violent means to 'resist the totalitarian oppression of the entire region, hence caused the Umbrella Movement in 2014 and the 2019 Hong Kong protests' (cited from Sykes, 2020: 86).

The 2019 Hong Kong protests depicted Hong Kongers' demand for social justice, democracy, and strong desire to distinct their unique identities from China, hence challenging Chinese national identity construction and the legitimacy of the CCP. In response, the CCP propagated the protests as extremely violent demonstrations plotted by hostile foreign forces, thus incorporating ideologies into media discourses and igniting so-called patriotism, essentially nationalism to legitimise a unified national identity as 'Self' and de-legitimise Hong Kongers' identity as 'Other', hence enhancing its ruling legitimacy. Thus, the crucial issue is to analyse how Self and Other represented this issue through CDA. Therefore, the following chapters will conduct an in-depth textual analysis of the Chinese state and social media discourses and investigate how the CCP represents 'Self' as legitimate, and delegitimate 'Other' through CDA. Nevertheless, it is essential to discuss CDA first, as it is the main theoretical and methodological approach of this thesis.

Chapter 3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by explaining what Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is, e.g., its historical origins, definitions of critical/critique, the concept of discourse, and the meaning of analysis. In addition, given the complex and multi-dimensional narratives surrounding the 2019 Hong Kong protests between China and Hong Kong, it becomes imperative to employ a versatile research approach which not only focuses on analysing the discourses *per se* but, more importantly, unpacks these discourses within their corresponding context to reveal how they related to the intricate and in-depth sociopolitical issues such as identity, legitimacy and power. Against this backdrop, CDA, as an interdisciplinary, eclectic, and unbiased research approach that specialises in discursive analysis, has been applied in this thesis as the primary theoretical and methodological framework. At the end of this chapter, I detailed the data collection and sampling process of the Chinese state and social media, Hong Kong mass media, and social media from the West, as well as the specific methodological steps followed during the analysis phase.

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

CDA is an auxiliary aspect of Critical Linguistics (hereafter CL), and was influenced by Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL). However, Fairclough proposes replacing CL with CDA due to the limitations of the former. He claims that the limitations of CL are: a). CL treats texts as 'products' but rarely discusses how such products are produced or interpreted; b). CL does not admit discourse as an arena in which social struggle exists, nor does it attribute changes in discourse to change of social or cultural context. Instead, CL overemphasises 'the influence of discourse on the social reproduction of existing social relations and structures'; c). CL narrowly defines the interface between ideology and language, ignores ideological significance of texts and only pays attention to grammar and vocabulary; d). CL mainly discusses the ideological aspects of 'written monologue' rather than spoken dialogue; and e). CL puts a lot of emphasis on the embodiment of ideologies in texts without involving the process of interpretation (Fairclough, 1992: 28-29). Although Fairclough believes that CDA is more comprehensive than CL, broadly speaking, the two approaches share significant similarities, with a substantial convergence in their research areas, e.g.,

both of them deal critically with texts and focus on explicit or opaque structural relationships of domination, discrimination, power, and control in discourse (Chang, 2012: 111).

The early development of CDA is primarily attributed to three leading scholars, i.e., Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak and Tuen van Dijk. Fairclough's work, i.e., the Dialectical-Relational Approach, laid the foundation for understanding how discourse shapes and is shaped by social power structures. Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA, for more details, please see 3.3) integrates historical context into discourse analysis, emphasising the importance of socio-political and historical factors. In the meantime, Van Dijk attempts to incorporate cognitive processes in his discourse analytical approaches, i.e., the Socio-Cognitive Approach. Together, these scholars have contributed significantly to the interdisciplinary and multifaceted nature of CDA, highlighting its relevance and application in addressing complex social phenomena. However, the status of CDA as an independent methodological discipline remains a much-debated topic. Van Dijk, who prefers the term Critical Discourse Studies[7] (CDS) over Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), argues that neither CDA nor CDS is a research method *per se*. Instead, he claims that CDA/CDS represents an academic movement comprising scholars dedicated to examining societal and political issues (van Dijk, 2007).

More specifically, Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 271-80) flagged seven central tenets of CDA, which encapsulate key theoretical assumptions within CDA, i.e., power, ideology, discourse and critique:

1. CDA addresses social problems;

CDA provides a toolkit for understanding the complex ways in which language plays a role in shaping, reinforcing, and potentially challenging societal issues. By analysing discourse critically, researchers can gain deeper insights into the roots of social problems and strategies more effectively to address them;

7. While CDS is rapidly becoming the favoured acronym, Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) was previously referred to as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018: 1-2). The current term is CDS, as per Wodak and Meyer (2016) changed the title of the third edition of Methods of Critical Discourse Studies from the title of the first two editions, which was Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis. This thesis sees CDS - as CDA in a broad sense, and the researcher will still use CDA in this thesis.

2. Power relations are discursive;

Power relations are not solid. Instead, they are reproduced, negotiated or transformed in discourse. CDA underscores and recognises the discursive and linguistic nature of social power relations.

3. Discourse constitutes society and culture;

Discourse is integral to how societies and cultures define themselves, set their boundaries, and decide what is ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ of those boundaries. They are the glue that holds together our shared understandings, but they are also the battleground where different interpretations of the world contested and negotiated. Thus, by examining discourse, researchers can unveil the underlying structures, beliefs, and power dynamics of the society or culture.

4. Discourse does ideological work;

Discourse plays a pivotal role in performing ideological work within societies. According to KhosraviNik (2015), discourse is not only a container and carrier of ideologies, which are the system of beliefs, values, and ideas that shape our understanding of the world, but also actively involved in re/producing, re/creating and reshaping ideologies (KhosraviNik, 2015: 47). As time goes by, these ideological discourses become naturalised through repeated exposure and internalisation, meaning they are taken for granted as inherent truths.

5. Discourse is historical;

Discourse is inextricably connected to history, embodying the socio-cultural, political, and economic contexts from which it originates. Every discourse is imbued with traces of historical moments, encapsulating past events, ideas, conflicts, and shifts. This means when analysing discourse, researchers are not merely scrutinising a collection of statements/texts but exploring a dynamic continuum of evolving ideas that have interacted, confronted, and merged.

6. The link between text and society is mediated;

The relationship between text and society is not direct but mediated, influenced and shaped by various intervening processes and structures. Texts, whether written,

spoken, or visual, do not exist in isolation but are situated within a complex web of social norms, values, and power relations.

7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory;

At its core, being interpretive and explanatory indicates that discourse analysis seeks to go beyond surface-level interpretations of texts and aims to uncover intricate meanings, intentions, and power structures embedded within discourse. To use Cook's (2001) words, discourse is to put text and context together.

Although CDA has gained significant recognition and progression as a paradigm in research linguistics (Wodak, 2001a), it has also faced severe criticism. For instance, Widdowson (1995, 2004) argues that CDA relies on selective and ideologically driven interpretations to bolster its stance. Thus, CDA is subjective and biased. In the meantime, Shi Xu, who appears to address ethnocentrism and advocates the incorporation of 'Eastern' paradigm of discourse studies, takes a polemic and intellectual unproductive stance against CDA, accusing it of being culturally biased (KhosraviNik, 2015). He argues that:

> CDA practitioners, whether based in the East or West, do not normally reflect culturally critically but only blindly apply CDA's concepts, values, and models to their chosen phenomena and questions, whether or not they are situated in Asia, Africa, Latin America or elsewhere (Shi, 2009: 33).

Regarding the loopholes in a given CDA study, Shi also points to some interesting, potentially fundamental differences in life philosophies in the Confucian Chinese context and 'Western philosophies', which can impact how discourse and communication are theorised. He maintains that most CDA work focuses on the utilitarian application of language in the West, which is contradicted by the Chinese traditional norm of communication, namely, to be not self-centred but social-other-centred (Shi, 2009: 34). To use KhosraviNik's (2015) words, such focus on the specificities of language use could add valuable consideration in CDA studies of international contexts, and CDA researchers in "other" contexts need to be 'mindful of, reflexive upon and helpful to their contexts' (KhosraviNik, 2015: 76).

To sum up, as an interdisciplinary approach to discursive analysis, CDA not only aims to investigate discourse *per se* but, more importantly, to examine the embedded ideologies within or behind discourse, hence raising awareness and revealing how

power is subtly maintained, negotiated and legitimised in discourse through both opaque and explicit means. By doing so, CDA contributes to social emancipation (van Dijk, 2001b; Wodak and Meyer, 2001). On the other hand, despite CDA's significant progression since its foundation, it still faces detraction for perceived bias and lack of objectivity. Against this backdrop, the following sections will deconstruct CDA from perspectives such as critical/critique, discourse, and analysis, then discuss the ontology and epistemology of CDA to explicate and rationalise the application of this versatile and eclectic approach within the thesis.

3.2.1 Critical/Critique in CDA

In CDA, the terms 'critical' and 'critique' are often used interchangeably, reflecting the approach's emphasis on both theoretical and methodological reflexivity and sociopolitical critique (KhosraviNik, 2015). Fairclough (1985) claims that the term 'critique' highlights the need for analysts to uncover the ideological foundations of discourse, which have become deeply embedded and normalised over time, making them appear as ordinary and inherent aspects of discourse (Fairclough, 1985: 739). Thus, applying a critical stance in the analysis will enable us to 'elucidate such naturalisations' and make clear social determinations and effects of discourse' (KhosraviNik, 2015: 51). In the meantime, being 'critical' not only influences all levels of analysis, e.g., from identifying social problems and data selection (for more details, please see 3.6) to methodology and textual analysis, but also directly links to the concept of contextualisation and hence triggers the essential inter-disciplinarity of CDA (KhosraviNik, 2009: 479). To use Wodak's (2001a) words, 'critical' is to be understood as having a distance to the data, embedding the data in the social, taking a political stance explicitly and focus on self-reflection as scholars doing research (Wodak, 2001a: 9). Given those mentioned above, critical/critique becomes quintessential and core concepts in CDA (Wodak and Meyer, 2009a).

The criticality of CDA can also be explained in terms of analytical requirements. CDA considers the systematic description of a discourse - as in accounting for the textual/linguistic characteristics of the language in use - as merely the first (though essential) level of analysis (KhosraviNik, 2015: 52). As Wodak and Meyer maintain,

> CDA is therefore not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se, but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require a multi-disciplinary and multi-methodical approach (2009a: 2).

This quotation suggests that CDA is not primarily concerned with examining individual linguistic elements for their own sake (i.e., words, phrases, or sentences in isolation). Instead, its focus lies in exploring social phenomena - the complex structures, relationships, and processes which shape societies. In addition, because CDA sees language not just as a system of signs and symbols, but as a social practice that reflects, shapes, and reproduces social structures and power relations, thus, any piece of discourse such as political speeches, newspaper articles or social media posts cannot be fully understood without considering their relevant social, political, cultural, and historical background in which it is produced (for more details on the context of this thesis, please see Chapter 2).

3.2.2 Discourse in CDA

The implicit and explicit meanings associated with the term ‘discourse’ seem to have proliferated throughout the social-science literature, contributing to conceptual obscurities, confusion and potential criticism (KhosraviNik, 2015: 58). In a key insight, CDA holds that discourse - as ‘language in use in any form’ - is both,

> Socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned - it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it. Since discourse is so socially consequential, it gives rise to important issues of power (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258).

This statement suggests that discourse, or language use in general, as an integral part of social practices, not only re/present the status quo but also can re/define, re/shape, transform or even construct it. In other words, the relationship between discourse and society is a dialectic one. The dialectic organisation of discourse in society is at work both at the micro level of formation, modification and interpretation of discourse and the macro level, where discourses as a special form of social action interact with other social practices (Fairclough, 2001). That said, discourse internalises all the other elements without being reduced to them because social relations, social identities, cultural values, and consciousness are part semiotic (Fairclough, 2001: 231). Given those mentioned above, it is argued that discourse may be realised by all semiotic systems, i.e., not just language, but visual and multi-modal systems of signs (Flowerdew and Richadson, 2018: 3)

Wodak maintains that discourse, or language in use, is a form of social practice, but she also priorities the element of actual language as the starting point on a 'demystification journey' in a CDA study (KhosraviNik, 2009: 479). Wodak (2001b: 66) defines discourse as:

> A complex bundle of simultaneously and sequential interrelated linguistic acts, which manifest themselves within and across social fields of action and thematically interrelated semiotic, oral and written tokens, very often as 'texts', that belong to specific semiotic types, that is genre.

Wodak and Meyer (2009a: 17) compare the relationship between discourse and language use to grammar and realised language. They argue that 'in the same way as grammar characteristics the structure of sentences, discourse rules characterise utterances/texts that are acceptable within a certain practice' (KhosraviNik, 2009: 480). Discourse 'implies patterns and commonalities of knowledge and structures whereas a 'text is specific and unique realisation of a discourse' in such a way that 'a text creates no sense in itself but only in connection with knowledge of the world and of the text' (Wodak and Krzyżanowski, 2008: 6-8).

3.2.3 Analysis in CDA

CDA draws from various theoretical backgrounds, maintaining its critical and explanatory characteristics. To achieve its explanatory depth, CDA must be interdisciplinary. Additionally, its theoretical and methodological diversity provides CDA with comprehensive and eclectic analytical power (KhosraviNik 2015). CDA offers a spectrum of theories from grand to micro-level, along with a variety of methodological categories tailored to the data (for more details, please see 3.6) and research questions (for more details, please see 1.5). This flexibility allows researchers to adopt diverse approaches, incorporating different methods based on theoretical perspectives and research goals. In the meantime, maintaining analytical rigor is essential throughout the research process. However, the intricate interrelations between discourse and society cannot be adequately analysed without combining linguistic and sociological approaches (Weiss and Wodak, 2003). Against this backdrop, Wodak (2006) argues for the development of an analytical model that integrates cognitive, linguistic, and sociological categories. This integration is necessary to address the significant gap between society and discourse effectively (KhosraviNik, 2015).

Nevertheless, it is noted that the analysis process within CDA should never depart from its main tenet, i.e., dedication to social change and problem-orientedness. Wodak (2008) states that discourse analysis provides a fundamental framework for researchers who seek to address social issues, as it facilitates 'the integration of different dimensions of interdisciplinary and multiple perspectives on the object investigated' (KhosraviNik, 2015: 63). This claim suggests that discourse analysis encourages a holistic approach rather than a narrow perspective. By integrating various interdisciplinary dimensions and applying rigorous academic attitudes, critical discourse studies are not merely critical in their *analysis* but also critical in their *theory* and *application* as well (van Dijk, 2009: 62-3). This statement aligns with the core essence of CDA in its 'critical' nature (for more details, please see 3.2.1).

In conclusion, CDA aims not only to understand discourse but to critique and uncover hidden power structures, biases, and ideologies in or behind discourses. Without CDA, these discourses might be misinterpreted as 'truth', leading to skewed perceptions and misinformation. Moreover, by applying a critical and discerning approach and promoting reflexive engagement with discourse, CDA seeks to reveal how language can dominate and perpetuate social inequalities. Hence, it potentially instigates meaningful social change by making power dynamics visible, amplifying marginalised voices, and challenging hegemonic narratives.

3.2.4 Power and Ideology in CDA

The notion of power in or behind discourse is quintessential to CDA (KhosraviNik, 2015). Power is defined in terms of control, with groups possessing power if they can control the actions and minds of other groups (van Dijk, 2001a). This ability assumes that power is based on the 'privileged access to scarce social resources, such as coercive force, money, status, fame, knowledge, information, culture (as in high/low) or indeed various forms of public discourse and communication' (KhosraviNik, 2015: 64). Through linking power, critique and ideology together, Wodak and Meyer (2009) highlight four characteristics of ideologies, i.e., (1) in ideology, 'power is more important than cognition'; (2) 'ideologies are capable of guiding individuals' evaluations' and (3) 'provide guidance through action,' as well as (4) having to be 'logically coherent' (KhosraviNik, 2015: 64-5, cited in Wodak and Meyer, 2009: 8).

Wodak and Meyer (2009a) argue that, although Foucault includes violence in characterising the discipline of discourse during the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries, violence is not a necessary characteristic of enforcement. Therefore, discourses exercise power by institutionalising and regulating ways of thinking, talking, and acting. While CDA acknowledges Foucauldian notions of power and domination, it interprets Foucault's focus as more structural than agent-based. CDA views texts as manifestations of social action so the analysis of invisible power should be pursued to understand the dynamics and specifics of such control (KhosraviNik, 2015).

Fairclough (2003: 9) defines ideology as 'representations of aspects of the world which contribute to establishing and maintaining relations of power, domination and exploitation' which 'may be enacted in ways of interaction and inculcated in ways of being identities'. However, the link between power and language is not a direct one. For CDA, language 'gains power by the use powerful people make of it' (Weiss and Wodak, 2003: 14). In addition, power is manifested not only through grammatical forms in a text but also through one's control over social situations (KhosraviNik, 2015). In short, language is never neutral in its social, representational function but serves to legitimise organised power relations (for more details, please see Chapter 4 and 5).

As aforementioned (for more details, please see 3.2.2), discourse not only permeates almost all social practices but also indirectly shapes them, e.g., discourse carries power by conventionalising hierarchies, norms, and assumptions (KhosraviNik, 2015: 65). Although the degree and mechanisms of power negotiations, constitution, and perpetuation differ across socio-political contexts and genres, the central thesis remains that language bears increasingly substantiates power, and the assumption is hard to deny (KhosraviNik, 2015). This statement suggests that language is not just a passive communication medium; instead, it plays more and more significant roles in shaping, sustaining, and reflecting power dynamics in the current society.

3.2.5 Ontology and Epistemology of CDA

Ontology seeks to understand the essence of reality, or 'what is' (Crotty, 1998). Within the context of CDA, this principle explores how reality is perceived, structured, and constructed through discourse (Fairclough, 1992). CDA's ontology is grounded in social constructionism, which posits that our understanding of reality is socially constructed. Discourse is not merely a reflection of social reality but a dynamic force that shapes social structures and ideologies. In this context, discourse is often used to establish, reproduce, or challenge power relations and social hierarchies (KhosraviNik, 2015).

In this thesis, the ontology of CDA provides a critical lens to understand the discursive strategies employed by different factions (for more details, please see 3.6) during the 2019 Hong Kong protests. This includes the Chinese side (for more details, please see 3.6.1 and 3.6.3), which sees the protests as challenging China's sovereignty and territorial integrity and hence firmly opposes the demonstrations, and the Hong Kong/Western side (for more details, please see 3.6.2 and 3.6.4), where people predominantly support the demonstrations. This ontological perspective enables a deeper analysis of how discourse constructs and contests social realities and power dynamics in this specific socio-political context.

As previously mentioned, discourse does not emerge in a vacuum. Instead, it is embedded within and influenced by broader social, political and cultural backgrounds (for more details, please see Chapter 2). This reciprocal relationship between discourse and society means that while discourse is shaped by society, it can also shape and transform society. Additionally, the ontological basis of CDA emphasises the importance of historical context. For instance, the discourse around the 2019 Hong Kong protests is influenced by past events, such as Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997 and the 2014 Umbrella Movement (for more details, please see 1.2), while simultaneously influencing future social movements in Hong Kong. This suggests that discourse is not static; instead, it evolves, reflects, and contributes to broader historical transformations.

In the meantime, CDA recognises that discourse can be a tool of domination used by those in power (e.g., the CCP in this thesis) to maintain and extend their control over the ruled. Simultaneously, CDA views discourse as a potential medium of resistance, enabling marginalised groups (e.g., the protestors in this thesis) to challenge prevailing power structures. By acknowledging discourse as a shaping force, this thesis examines how power dynamics and representations of identity and legitimacy were negotiated, constructed, and contested through discourse, hence elucidating why representations of the protests by the Self and the Other differed.

In conclusion, the ontology of CDA offers a nuanced lens through which to examine the media discourses surrounding the 2019 Hong Kong protests (for more details, please see 3.6). By applying CDA in this study, I can delve deeper into analysing media discourses rather than focusing on the surface of the protests. Hence, I can elucidate

how discourses both shaped and were shaped by the protests while also illuminating the intricate relationships among identity, legitimacy, and representation.

As a branch of philosophy, epistemology explores the nature, origin, and scope of knowledge (Dancy et al., 2010). The epistemology of CDA provides insight into how discourse, as a central means of communication, shapes our social realities and conveys power dynamics within society. As mentioned above (for more details, please see 3.2), CDA proposes that our understanding of reality is socially constructed, rooted in its ontology of social constructivism (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Consequently, CDA asserts that discourse is not merely a simple reflection of reality but an integral form of social practice, deeply intertwined with social structures and power relations. In other words, discourse both constructs and is constructed by society (Fairclough, 1995).

Central to CDA's epistemology is the *critical* approach towards widely accepted knowledge and truth (for more details, please see 3.2.1). CDA contends that what is often presented as truth or common sense is usually a socially constructed version of reality, crafted to serve particular interests, especially those of dominant groups (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2001). Therefore, CDA promotes a sceptical attitude towards taken-for-granted knowledge (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999), emphasising the need to meticulously examine how such knowledge is created, who benefits from it, and how it is maintained and challenged (Wodak and Meyer, 2016).

In the context of this thesis (for more details, please see 1.1), this epistemological stance facilitates a detailed analysis of how media discourses from both Chinese and Hong Kong/Western perspectives constructed and challenged particular versions of reality (Huckin, 1997). The focus on 'critical' analysis enables the researcher to go beyond surface-level narratives and unearth underlying motivations, biases, and power dynamics within the protests. By foregrounding power relations in discourse (KhosraviNik, 2015), this thesis primarily elucidates how the CCP legitimises Self and delegitimises Other's counter-narratives in terms of the protests. For instance, the CCP legitimises its suppressive actions towards the protests by highlighting national unity and territorial sovereignty (for more details, please see 4.3). In contrast, discourse from the protestors (for more details, please see Chapter 6) seeks to challenge entrenched power structures and maintain Hong Kong's identity and status quo, i.e., democracy and high autonomy.

Meanwhile, CDA's pursuit of social emancipation illuminates the ethical dimensions of this research. This orientation maintains that discourse is never neutral but actively engaged in constructing social realities and challenging social inequalities. Amid this background, through interrogating diverse media discourse of the protests (for more details, please see 3.6), this thesis uncovers hidden factors of the protests, i.e., the CCP's systematic erosion of Hong Kong's high autonomy.

To sum up, the epistemology of CDA embodies a constructivist understanding of knowledge, a critical stance towards dominant discourses and truth, and a commitment to social justice. By adopting CDA in this thesis, the researcher can delve deeply into the 2019 Hong Kong protests, unpacking and elaborating on how discourses both shape and are shaped by the protests.

3.3 Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA)

KhosraviNik (2015) argues that the Discourse-Historical Approach (hereafter DHA), combined with van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, is an influential approach for the discursive analysis of Self and Other representations. DHA focuses on interdiscursivity and the historical analysis of 'discourses in place', which emphasises the historical dimension of the issue under investigation (Van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999: 91). In the meantime, DHA is also concerned with the broader societal and political mechanisms involved in the production and interpretation of discourse.

The DHA begins its investigation at the meaning level (i.e., content) and then examines the strategies of linguistic realisation. At last, it analyses the linguistic realisation as the end product. In other words, DHA is concerned with the semantics of communication as the essence of discourse analysis and moves towards the surface structure afterwards (KhosraviNik, 2015: 68). In doing so, DHA provides a comprehensive viewpoint and understanding of discourse, highlighting its enduring connections through time.

KhosraviNik (2015: 70) asserts that DHA is perhaps the most explicit approach to detailed textual analysis and conceptualisation of the notion of discourse, which emerges from the data under analysis. On the operationalisation level, i.e., from theory to applied discourse analysis, Reisigl and Wodak (2009: 93) state that the DHA has proposed a set of analytical stages with three dimensions, namely, a). identify and/or classify specific contents or topics in designated discourse; b). investigate the

discursive strategies involved; and c). examine and analyse linguistic means (as types) and specific, context-dependent linguistic realisations. More specifically, the DHA is heuristically oriented towards engaging in finding answers to the following five questions (KhosraviNik, 2015: 107):

(1). How are persons, objects, phenomena/events, processes and actions named and referred to in linguistic terms in a specific discourse?

(2). What features, qualities, and characteristics are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events and processes?

(3). What arguments are employed in the discourse in question?

(4). From what perspective are these nominations, attributions and arguments expressed?

(5). Are the respective utterances overtly articulate, are they intensified or mitigated?

The five questions mentioned above correspond to the DHA's key discursive strategies, which are listed and briefly explained its objectives and devices in Table 3-1:

Strategy	Objectives	Devices
nomination	discursive construction of social actors, objects/phenomena/ events and processes/actions	● membership categorization devices, deictics, anthroponyms, etc. ● tropes such as metaphors, metonymies and synecdoches (*pars pro toto, totum pro parte*) ● verbs and nouns used to denote processes and actions, etc.
predication	discursive qualification of social actors, objects, phenomena, events/processes and actions (more or less positively or negatively)	● stereotypical, evaluative attributions of negative or positive straits (e.g. in the form of adjectives, appositions, prepositional phrases, relative clauses, conjunctional clauses, infinitive clauses and participial clauses or groups) ● explicit predicates or predicative nouns/adjectives/pronouns ● collocations ● explicit comparisons, similes, metaphors and other rhetorical figures (including metonymies, hyperboles, litotes, euphemisms) ● allusions, evocations, presuppositions/implicatures, etc.
argumentation	justification and questioning of claims of truth and normative rightness	● topoi (formal or more content-related) ● fallacies
perspectivization, framing or discourse representation	positioning speaker's or writer's point of view and expressing involvement or distance	● deicitcs ● direct, indirect or free indirect speech ● quotation marks, discourse markers/particles ● metaphors ● animating prosody, etc.
intensification, mitigation	modifying (intensifying or mitigating) the illocutionary force and thus the epistemic or deontic status of utterances	● diminutives or augmentatives ● (modal) particles, tag questions, subjunctive, hesitations, vague expressions, etc. ● hyperboles, litotes ● indirect speech acts (e.g. question instead of assertion) ● verbs of saying, feeling, thinking, etc.

Table 3-1 Summary of methods within the DHA (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009: 94)

3.3.1 CDA and Self/Other representation

KhosraviNik (2015) states that the construction of group identities contributes to power relations and ideologies from multiple perspectives, i.e., economic, political and social aspects. The discursive representations of Self in the corporate world operate within a

strictly economic and market-based logic (Wodak and Koller, 2008, as cited in KhosraviNik, 2015: 71). In contrast, representations of various social groups, such as ethnic minorities, primarily fall within the social realm. The representation of ethnic, racial and cultural minorities in society can contribute to unequal power dynamics, where hegemonic ideologies enforce a dichotomous Us vs Them representation (also see KhosraviNik, 2008, 2009, 2010b).

Meanwhile, the dichotomisation of Us vs. Them is a pivotal recurring theme central to discriminatory discourses, with various aspects and characteristics extensively discussed (Wodak et al., 1999). It is argued that media control and censorship can contribute to constructing Us vs. Them for different political aims (KhosraviNik, 2015). However, the mechanisms of how media influence public consciousness are still under investigation. Previously, Van Dijk (1987) and van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) incorporated cognitive psychology insights and tried to explain the mechanisms. More recently, some quantitative analysis methods, e.g., corpus-linguistics, have been proposed to combine the traditionally qualitative approach, such as CDA, to examine the qualities of discourses which construct and characterise the dichotomy of Us vs. Them.

3.4 CDA and Mass Media

Nowadays, with its absolute power to control symbolic resources, the mass media plays a pivotal role in shaping public opinion, legitimating power structures, and reinforcing certain ideologies (van Dijk, 1991). The textual features of news in mass media play an active and political role in cultural relations of power (KhosraviNik, 2015). In other words, the news is active in the politics of sense-making, even when the stories concern matters that are not usually understood as political but specialised in other fields (KhosraviNik, 2015: 72). Fairclough (1993) points out that the mass communication has created a mass and almost always unidirectional discursive practice and a major power regulatory mechanism.

On the other hand, the mass media are closely tied to market demands, indicating that they cannot claim to merely reflect public preferences. Instead, their practical and commercial interests often shape their content and goals (KhosraviNik, 2015). Given this, the media often justify, preserve, and represent the interest of dominant groups (Fairclough, 1993; for more details, please see 2.3.1 - 2.3.2). The key factor here is the nature of communication, which is mass-mediated rather than local and interpersonal (KhosraviNik, 2015). Consequently, mass media such as news, film, and

advertising play a crucial role in the persuasive production of dominant ideologies (van Dijk, 1988: 213).

KhosraviNik (2015: 72) argues that the language used in the media and news is the most pervasive and widespread discourse exposed to people from all backgrounds and social levels. That is, news has a social, political and educational role, so that people can understand and explain how events reported in the media relate to their society and lives. Furthermore, Caldas-Coulthard (2003: 273) maintains that news is always a report or contextualisation of an event rather than an objective representation of facts. In other words, it is a culture construct that encodes fixed values, suggesting that news is not only the event but a partial, ideologically framed report of the event.

In addition, Hartmann and Husband claim that the media provides people with a constructed picture of the world, making certain attitudes more likely to develop (KhosraviNik, 2015). Consequently, control over media and news production holds unique significance due to its extensive influence over the public and its ability to dominate various of genres of discourse (KhosraviNik, 2015: 74). This is particularly evident in China, where, as discussed in previous chapters (for more details, please see 2.3), the media system is predominantly controlled by the CCP, serving as an extension of its political power rather than challenging its narratives and legitimacy.

However, the proliferation of social media has triggered a paradigm shift. Unlike mass media, which is controlled by the ruling authority, social media empowers the public to create and distribute content freely. This shift underscores the evolving dynamics of communication and necessitates an analytical approach that transcends traditional mass media. Accordingly, the next section will explore the relationship between CDA and social media, shedding light on how discourse is manifested and negotiated within this emerging digital space.

3.5 CDA and Social Media

KhosraviNik (2015) states that in affluent societies, many adults and teenagers use social media daily, including Social Networking Sites (SNSs) like Instagram and Facebook, micro/blogging sites such as Twitter and Weibo (for more details, please see 2.3.4), and instant messaging apps, e.g., WhatsApp and WeChat (for more details, please also see 2.3.4). They also integrate social media into various aspects of their lives. Meanwhile, there is a notable increase in social media engagement in less

affluent societies, exemplified by the growing use of text messaging for various social and commercial activities. As a new communicative paradigm, social media facilitates diverse modes of communication beyond traditional face-to-face interactions and offers new spaces for public participation, grassroots access and use of symbolic resources, although varying across socio-political contexts (KhosraviNik, 2017: 583).

The nature, location, and dynamics of discursive power in social media, or the participatory web (Web 2.0), are fluid and changeable (KhosraviNik, 2017: 582). Since the mid-2000s, social media has dominated Web 2.0 (Androutsopoulos, 2008). This shift has fundamentally changed communication dynamics, extending audience roles from passive reception to active production and consumption together, i.e., presumption, a term that blends *production* and *consumption* together, suggesting that in the current digital era, audiences create and consume content simultaneously, breaking away from the traditional unidirectional and one-to-many mass media model and embracing a many-to-many dynamic of discursive practice (KhosraviNik, 2017; Ghaffari, 2022). As Jones et al. (2015) argue:

> Social media communication has challenged the traditional static understanding of media power. Within digital discursive environments, the loci of power are much more diffuse, and instruments of ideological control and discipline are more subtle and complex (2015:1).

This assertion suggests that the dynamics of power and information have evolved significantly in the digital era. Unlike the traditional mass media landscape, where a few outlets control information flow, social media offers a decentralised space for multiple viewpoints. It fosters information and prosumption-oriented discursive fields, enabling individuals to construct their own social identities (Ghaffari, 2022: 161). Meanwhile, its influence on political communication is profound. That is, social media shifts from traditional mass media's centralised communication to participatory communication, potentially providing more decentralised and democratised access to discursive power (KhosraviNik, 2018).

Indeed, media are essential in representing social realities (Brooks and Hébert, 2006) by functioning in ways to express and describe things and also to tell people how to deal with them (Morgan, 2007). However, mass media have been criticised for their stereotypical and restricted representations, as power in mass media is seen as a top-down process of reconstructing and reshaping social realities. In contrast, social media

in contemporary society provides opportunities for citizens to be more active in information production and distribution by challenging discourses, sharing and publishing alternative perspectives and their own opinions (Fotopoulou, 2017; Loader and Mercea, 2012). Although these distinct affordances do not dictate social media users' behaviour, they can shape how individuals engage with these environments (Boyd, 2010: 39).

KhosraviNik and Esposito (2018: 47) state that the unique affordances of social media, e.g., anonymity, have a significant role in freeing people from following social norms and sanctions. Given this, social media may become a venting place where different voices and opinions can be expressed and coexist, which prevailing social norms stifle. However, this expression may lead to both constructive and destructive outcomes, e.g., it can foster creativity, activism and mainstreamed marginalised voices (for more details, please see Chapter 6) but may also transform social media platforms into a breeding ground of nationalistic emotions (for more details, please see Chapter 5). However, the dichotomy of online affordance generates profound influence, reshaping the boundaries of discourse and the very nature of social interaction in the digital age.

According to KhosraviNik (2017), while debatable, the power behind media discourse appears compromised in participatory networks, indicating a shift towards a more engaged relationship between media and society. However, this does not imply that social constructs of identity and communities around Self and Others have disappeared (KhosraviNik, 2017: 583). His claim suggests that although social media may democratise discourse and decentralise discursive control, allowing users to become content contributors and distributors, the deeply rooted social structures remain. Therefore, the participatory web still influences how identities are perceived and constructed both online and offline. On the other hand, power in the participatory web is still a central aspect of the Habermasian notion of public sphere and management of power in discourse, i.e., bottom-up language in use (KhosraviNik, 2017: 587).

Given the abovementioned, CDA, as a socially committed, issue-driven, text-centred methodological approach, must address the increasing emphasis on digitally facilitated discursive spaces, such as social media (KhosraviNik, 2017). Traditionally, CDA focuses on analysing official texts, e.g., newspapers, rather than data from digital spaces. Therefore, integrating an approach that includes digital discourse analysis is

essential to capture the evolving nature of communication and its impact on social constructs. Against this backdrop, this thesis draws on insights from Social Media Critical Discourse Studies (SM-CDS) coined by Majid KhosraviNik, to deconstruct social media discourses and try to elaborate on the intricate and intertwined relations of identity and legitimacy, Self and Other representations of the 2019 Hong Kong protests between China and Hong Kong/the West.

To sum up, despite the rise of techno-pessimism around social media, these platforms remain vital for social, cultural, and political debates across various geopolitical and socio-cultural contexts. For example, KhosraviNik and Zia (2014) show how social media has consolidated identity discourse that is absent in Iran's official public sphere. Social media discourse should be evaluated case-by-case, as these platforms can reflect individual identities distinct from hegemonically constructed offline identities. CDA aims to link media text to social context, necessitating the integration of computer-mediated identity discourses into broader social identity processes. Thus, KhosraviNik (2017a) and KhosraviNik and Esposito (2018) propose double contextualisation at digital (horizontal) and social (vertical) levels to account for technological affordances and digital discourse practices. It is also worth noting that digital discourse is viewed as part and parcel of social discourse. To use KhosraviNik's (2014) words, technology or not, we analyse discourse. In other words, the cultural politics of social media discourse is thus part of broader media discourse ecologies (Ghaffari, 2022: 164).

3.6 Summary of the Data

This thesis garners data from a judicious blend of traditional and digital media sources, offering a comprehensive perspective on the 2019 Hong Kong protests. On the one hand, it delves into discourses from two major Chinese state media outlets and a prominent Hong Kong newspaper, representing a top-down perspective. On the other, it examines discourses from two indigenous Chinese and two Western social media platforms, providing a bottom-up viewpoint. This diverse dataset offers a nuanced understanding of both authoritative and grassroots narratives surrounding the protests. During the peak intensity of the protests, spanning from June to August 2019, I strategically selected specific media sources based on their prominence and accessibility. From the Chinese state media's perspective, I picked discourses from the People's Daily (PD) and China Daily (CD). Concurrently, I sourced relevant data from the South China Morning Post (SCMP) within the identical timeframe to gain

insights from the Hong Kong's perspective. This approach ensures a balanced representation from both sides of the discourse during the most tumultuous phase of the protests.

The PD holds an unparalleled position within China's media landscape, operating with a stature equivalent to bureaucratic ministries (Jernow, 1993), marking it as one of the nation's most influential newspaper organisations. This distinction stems from its dual role as both the CCP's official newspaper and the country's largest newspaper group. The content disseminated by the PD goes beyond mere news reporting; it mirrors the voice and intentions of the central party leadership, setting the narrative tone for other mainstream media outlets within China. Thus, all other mainstream Chinese media must follow the PD's direction on what can be published, what is encouraged, and what is not allowed (Ma and Weiss, 2023). In addition, the PD plays a significant role during each crisis (e.g., the Cultural Revolution, the Tiananmen massacre, the 2019 Hong Kong protests, etc.) of the CCP, containing important information and directions from high-level CCP cadres. Although contemporary media consumption patterns, accelerated by the rapid proliferation of digital technologies and social media (see 2.3.1), have somewhat diminished its direct reach among the general populace, however, the PD's significance in shaping national discourse remains unwavering. Its intrinsic ties to the CCP underscore its function as a pivotal communicator of the Party's unified stance, even if its readership might evolve in the digital age (Liu, 2019).

The CD is an official news organisation which was established in 1981 and is the widest-circulation English-language newspaper in China. The newspaper and its various international editions as an instrument of China's public diplomacy, has been used as a guide to the Chinese government's policy (Lams, 2017; Schnell, 2001), and to communicate positions of the CCP to the English-speaking world (Liu, 2015; Wang, 2018). According to Hartig (2020), CD's primary targets are diplomats, foreign expatriates, tourists, and locals wishing to improve their English, and the CD's editorial policies have historically been described as slightly more liberal than other Chinese state news outlets (Hartig, 2017; Heuvel and Dennis, 1993; Liu, 2009). For instance, according to Cheng (2016), the CD's reporting style of the Tiananmen Square protests and massacre in 1989 was overwhelmingly sympathetic to those student protestors, and a great number of CD's journalists joining the mass demonstrations as well. Also, during the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in 2003, the CD's reporting tended to be more critical, fact-driven, and less laudatory than that of the PD

(Chang, 2013). However, it is argued that since Xi Jinping's ruling in 2012, the CD articles became more negative about democracy and shifted focus to depicting the "vices" of Western democracies, especially the United States (Hietanen, 2018). Cao et al. (2022) state, CD is commonly used discursive strategy to make comments through the use of appraisal resources in order to clearly express the official stance of the CCP towards a particular issue.

As aforementioned, in addition to the Chinese state media, the researcher also collected data from the Hong Kong side in SCMP with the same period (i.e., June to August 2019) in order to maintain balance. SCMP, which was founded as an independent newspaper in the Britain-occupied Hong Kong in 1903, is a quality newspaper of the territory that has reported on China and Asia for more than a century with global impact. SCMP enjoys freedom of the press as a non-governmental newspaper in the SAR of China governed by the framework of OCTS. The results of the surveys on media credibility in Hong Kong showed that SCMP possessed a high reputation in Hong Kong and its score of credibility was ranked first in nearly all of the years being surveyed.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that SCMP has no news stance of its own in the coverage. Since Hong Kong-based Kelly Media gained control over SCMP in October 1993, it was considered to slant toward the Chinese government. In spite of the denial by Kelly Media, the dismissal of the columnist Danny Gittings, the Beijing-based journalist Jasper Becker and the editor of China's edition Willy Wo-Lap Lam after its takeover was regarded as aiming to purify criticisms towards China's mainland (Pan, 2002). In December 2015, SCMP was merged and acquired by China's e-commerce giant Alibaba Group, which evoked further concern that SCMP would slant more to the Chinese government although Joseph Tsai, Vice Chairman of Ali, emphasised that Ali would not interfere in news editing (Barboza, 2015). One of the noticeable changes after its merger into Ali was that its Chinese-language website was closed and the paywall of its English-language website was cancelled in 2016, which was considered as an endeavour to make SCMP more accessible to the audience in the English-speaking world (Abkowitz, 2016; Fish et al. 2016). As was stated in the introduction of SCMP, its mission is to "Lead the global conversation about China".

At the same time, in light of the evolving technological and economic landscape, this research has recognised the significant role that social media plays in shaping

contemporary discourse and public opinion. Accordingly, the thesis expands its data parameters to include a robust examination of both Chinese and Western social media discourses, capturing a more comprehensive view of the narrative surrounding the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Chinese social media platforms, specifically Weibo and WeChat (see 2.3.4 for detailed discussion), offer invaluable insights into the domestic perception and discourse about the events. Weibo, similar to Twitter, is one of the most influential microblogging platforms in China. Whilst WeChat, beyond its primary function as a messaging app, is a multifaceted platform that provides a space for users to share news, articles and personal opinions, thereby encapsulating a more comprehensive range of public sentiments.

In addition, to grasp a more global perspective, this research delves into the discourses presented on two prominent Western social media platforms, Twitter and Facebook. Both platforms play pivotal roles in global information dissemination and are essential in understanding international viewpoints and narratives regarding the protests. Twitter, launched in 2006, is a microblogging platform established as a crucial medium for real-time information dissemination and public discourse. With a restriction on post length (i.e., originally 140 characters, later expanded to 280), Twitter encourages concise and timely communication. Over the years, it has become a platform where users, from individuals to global leaders, share thoughts and news and engage in dialogue. Its 'trending topics' feature offers a glimpse into current global conversations, ensuring users are consistently informed about worldwide happenings. In addition, The platform's retweet and reply functions promote interactivity and amplify messages, allowing specific tweets to garner significant attention and potentially go viral. Owing to its real-time nature, Twitter is frequently at the forefront during recent global events (see 6.2.1), often providing the initial narrative and public reaction (Twitter, 2023).

While Facebook, founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and a group of Harvard students, has evolved from a university-specific networking site to the world's preeminent social media platform. With billions of active users, it serves as a digital space for personal connections, content sharing, and community building. Its diversified features, including status updates, photo and video sharing, and live streaming, cater to various user preferences, making it a versatile platform for personal and professional engagement. Over time, Facebook Pages and Groups have emerged as powerful tools for businesses, celebrities and communities, promoting both brand-building and collaborative discussions. The platform's News Feed algorithmically curates content

for users, making it a significant influencer in terms of information dissemination. Moreover, its global reach ensures a diverse range of voices and narratives, making Facebook a crucial tool for understanding public sentiment and cultural trends worldwide (Phillips, 2007). Against this backdrop, the rigorous inclusion of these platforms' data ensures a multifaceted and holistic understanding of diverse narratives of the protests.

Nevertheless, in this research, the primary emphasis is placed on the representation of the Chinese 'Self' during the protests, necessitating a more in-depth analysis of discourses from the Chinese state and social media. Consequently, while data from the Hong Kong side (i.e., the SCMP) and Western social media platforms (i.e., Twitter and Facebook) are incorporated, both of them received a comparatively limited analytical focus. It is essential to clarify that this approach does not indicate any bias. Rather than adjudicating the correctness of one side over another, the principal objective of this thesis is to dissect media discourses to unveil the nuanced portrayals of the Self and the Other in the context of the same protests. The intent is to shed light on the undercurrents of the Chinese national identity crisis and potential challenges to the CCP's legitimacy, as revealed by the protests. Given this foundation, the subsequent sections will elucidate the specific data selection criteria and procedures employed to distil meaningful content from both traditional media and social media platforms.

3.6.1 Data from the Chinese Side: People's Daily and China Daily

This section unpacks the data selection logic from Chinese state media, specifically People's Daily (henceforth PD) and China Daily (hereafter CD). The selection process is motivated by three factors. Firstly, I started with the research background of the thesis, i.e., the 2019 Hong Kong protests. As the most significant and intense social movement in Hong Kong's history, the protests have profoundly impacted both Hong Kong and China. Considering their intertwined relations, the protests inevitably captured the close attention of Chinese media. From state media's perspective, PD, as the long-standing mouthpiece of the CCP and China's largest newspaper group, always reflects and echoes party leadership viewpoints and sets the narrative framework for other mainstream media outlets in China. As for CD, which aims to articulate China's developmental narrative and the CCP/Chinese government's official positions to English-speaking audiences, is a premier English-language newspaper

officially sanctioned by the party-state (Liu, 2015; Wang and Ma, 2021, also see 3.5). Thus, data collected from these sources guarantees its authenticity to represent the attitude of the Chinese side and could explicitly elaborate on the CCP's stance towards the protests.

The next factor, I considered is the specificity of this research, i.e., its research aims and questions. As aforementioned (see 1.5), instead of providing a purely balanced comparison between China (Self) and Hong Kong/Western (Other) media in representing the protests, the thesis's predominant aim is to analyse Chinese media discourses within its sociopolitical context to achieve its main research question of showing how China/the CCP's self-representation of the protests relates to the broader question of identity and the party's legitimacy. Against this backdrop, I assert that media articles collected from PD and CD are apt and reasonable for the above purpose, not only due to their authoritative status within the state media but, more importantly, for their resources are aligned with the thesis's aims and questions.

The final aspect influencing the selection process is characteristics of the adopted research approach, i.e., CDA. CDA defines its methodological parameters in relation to the sociological interventionist agenda which influences CDA qualitative methodologies. Through critical academic debates, CDA evolved quickly and became influential in the 1990s onward. Some detractors (e.g., Stubbs, 1997) criticised CDA for its data issues, i.e., how are data selected and why. This is understandably pertinent as some of the early influential works in CDA, e.g., Fairclough (1992) relied on limited scope of data, i.e., text analysis. The idea also stems from traditions in linguistics whereby systematic and mostly randomised data selection has been used in sub-disciplines in linguistics and often communication studies. This is similar to the now-famous critique of CDA as cherry-picking in its data selection (e.g., Lewin-Jones, 2016:77). Here, cherry-picking refers to endeavours to deliberately select the data that best fit the assumptions (Lewin-Jones, 2016).

One of the main arguments here is that CDA is an interpretivist approach by nature and rejects positivism in its overall epistemological framing. While previous research trends in linguistics and communication deal with counting and numerical rationality, CDA maintains that the main object of its research is meaning-making and that meanings are constructed at the intersection of language and society, i.e., analysing language in use. In other words, CDA assumes that there is no proper analysis of

meaning-making if the context of production and consumption of a text is not fully considered. To use Cook's (2001) words, discourse is to put text and context together. This means that in selecting the data, a pure numerical and randomised selection would not be readily usable for CDA research because the researcher should be able to maintain, elaborate and explain the context of the production and consumption of the texts. Hence, the data selection becomes *context-sensitive* but at the same time *as systematic as possible* (KhosraviNik, 2010).

Beyond this, according to Wodak and Meyer (2016), CDA is a set of approaches with theoretical similarities and contains specific kinds of research questions instead of an empirical research method. Given this, most CDA approaches 'do not explicitly explain or recommend data sampling procedures' (Wodak and Meyer, 2016: 21). Data, i.e. in the case of CDA discourses and texts, are never theory neutral and CDA does not support an automatic blind randomised data selection. In other words, what data to be collected and how they are interpreted depends on the theoretical perspective (ibid: 14). However, by combining qualitative and quantitative methods and providing retroductable [sic], self-reflective presentations of past or present research processes, this challenge (i.e., data cherry-picking) could be avoided (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). In addition, by using phrases such as 'I think' and 'I would predict that' (Fairclough, 1993: 14), critical discourse analysts can make their subjectivity explicit (Baker and Levon, 2015: 222).

Given the abovementioned, I mainly considered the following principles when selecting Chinese state media articles. First, I focused on topic-relatedness, i.e., all articles I picked are relevant to a). the 2019 Hong Kong protests per se instead of concentrating on trivial issues (e.g., how the protests damaged the economy and livelihood); and b). China/the CCP's self-representation of the protests. Secondly, I considered data selection issues in CDA and deliberatively chose articles to ensure that they were not theory-neutral but fit the overall theory perspective of the thesis. Finally, those collected articles must be context-sensitive, which means they not only fit the Chinese sociopolitical context but are also connected to the wider question of identity and legitimation of the CCP.

Data collection operations:

To operationalise the above, I set the timeframe for selected articles, both China and Hong Kong sides, from 1st June to 31st August 2019, during which the protests gained

momentum. In doing so, I ensured the selected articles focused as much as possible on the protests per se. From the state media's perspective, I selected articles from PD and CD online databases. Although I did not encounter data collection issues from the CD website, there was a setback when I tried to do this from PD. Initially, I intended to collect PD articles from its Chinese version database and translate them into English. Doing this would ensure the utmost rigour and authority of the data. However, due to being overseas and frequent operations on the website, I was mistaken for a virus attack programme and subsequently denied access to the site. Fortunately, I could still collect relevant data from the PD overseas edition website, which is where the thesis dataset is sourced.

In terms of data selection methods, I employed keyword searching in the thesis, as it offers the advantage of efficiently narrowing down vast amounts of data to relevant information aligned with specific research interests (Bates, 1979). The keywords I used in this thesis are: *Hong Kong*, *extradition*, *protests*, and *illegal*. I chose them to search for because a). The first three words provided comprehensive coverage of the nature of the 2019 Hong Kong protests from specific angles, i.e., geographical location, the initial cause, and the nature of the events; and b). Given the previous reporting style on similar issues (e.g., the 2014 Umbrella Movement), the last keyword (i.e., illegal) entails conspicuous insights from Chinese state media, which might surface articles that discuss the illegality and severe outcomes of the protests, hence explicate the CCP's viewpoints and potentially legitimate its suppression actions. In addition, to guarantee the final selected articles fully represent the protests from the Chinese side, I ticked the 'Advanced Search' option both on PD and CD databases, allowing me to input the abovementioned keywords (i.e., *Hong Kong*, *extradition*, *protests*, and *illegal*) simultaneously. At last, I gained 123 news articles in total, with 73 in PD and 50 in CD, respectively.

After carefully reading and skimming all the articles, I did some data cleaning and downsized the 123 pieces to ten, equally selected from PD and CD (i.e., five pieces each). To triangulate the media articles selection, I further selected two articles, two editorials, and one commentary from each newspaper for close detail analysis. The criteria for downsizing the collected data for analysis under CDA are frequency, representativity, (proto) typicality, intertextual or interdiscursive scope, salience, uniqueness, and redundancy (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016: 39). Specific to this research, the criteria are a). Representativity of media articles (i.e., all selected articles focused

on and explicitly reflected the CCP's attitude towards the protests); b). Salient discursive themes and arguments (see 4.2) I found among those articles, which (i.e., themes and arguments) are similar to former literature (e.g., Cao et al., 2022; Ma and Weiss, 2023; Yang, 2023); and c). As an approach, the CDA strand devised a 'systematic and sensitive mechanism' in downsizing the data (KhosraviNik, 2009: 482).

In conclusion, through the measures and triangulations explained above, I did my best to make the data selection process rigorous as well as representative. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, CDA is open to accommodating systematicity in data selection within the parameters of CDA principles and assumptions. This is why the data selection considerations, like the one for this research, often require a lengthy and calculated procedure to meet systematicity within sensitivity criteria (KhosraviNik, 2015).

3.6.2 Data from the Hong Kong Side: The SCMP

Compared to the stilted and propagandised-oriented Chinese media ecology (see 2.3 for the account of the background of the Chinese media landscape), the media landscape in Hong Kong is diverse and complicated, with abundant pro-government/the CCP and pro-liberal/democratic news organisations coexisting. Given this, collecting convincing data from the Hong Kong side became tricky. Yet, to fulfil the main research question of the thesis, data from the Hong Kong side is merely selected from the SCMP.

As mentioned earlier (see 1.4), this thesis is not meant to provide a fully balanced comparison of the Chinese vs. Hong Kong account of the protests. The overarching questions here is identity and legitimacy in China/the CCP's self-representation. The protests merely offered a major discursive concentration of the kind of texts and talk which would be effectively about identity and legitimacy of the CCP. This is a key factor in understanding of why there might have been less emphasis on Hong Kong identity and legitimacy representation. Through discursive analysis of texts within a specific sociopolitical context, this study was meant to connects China/the CCP's narratives of the protests to the broader issue of identity and the CCP's legitimacy. Against this backdrop, data selected from Hong Kong is less central than that from its Chinese counterpart; hence, providing a holistic and fully balanced data selection and analysis of local Hong Kong newspapers is unnecessary.

In the context of the above, the study was meant to choose an outlet which is relatively middle of the road and reasonable broadly. One of the factors here is that SCMP is a well-established newspaper. Founded in 1903 in Hong Kong, SCMP is the first high-quality English-language newspaper in a mainly Cantonese-speaking society (for more details about SCMP background, see 3.6). The newspaper holds a crucial position in the diversified Hong Kong media landscape. Over a century, SCMP also has had a global influence on reporting Hong Kong and China (Cao et al., 2022). In 2020, SCMP became the first Asia news organisation to join the Trust Project, the world's top media companies consortium committed to the highest standards of journalistic quality, transparency and credibility (SCMP, 2020). The factors mentioned above guarantee that data collected from SCMP to entirely represent the Hong Kong side is reliable.

Though arguable, the chose has also been about what can be considered a middle of the road outlet. While the '*One Country, Two Systems*' (henceforth OCTS) policy explicitly guarantees the protection of freedom of speech and other fundamental rights in Hong Kong (see 2.4 for more details on OCTS), the imperative to adhere to China's strict '*One Country*' principle has prompted Hong Kong news organisations to subtly align their editorial stances with the preferences of the Chinese government/the CCP. The SCMP is no exception. However, according to Cao et al. (2022), SCMP still maintains a relatively objective perspective compared to its local counterparts. For instance, despite its opposition to the adverse consequences of the 2014 Umbrella Movement on Hong Kong society, the SCMP's coverage was noted for its restraint and neutrality, offering a comprehensive narrative of the events during the turbulent period (Ho and Chiu, 2022).

While there is acknowledgement that there is not absolute neutrality, it can be argued that SCMP has been relatively neutral in the 2019 Hong Kong protests. SCMP presented a somewhat multi-dimensional and multi-perspective coverage of the demonstrations, incorporating diverse viewpoints and standpoints. On the one hand, it bluntly critiqued the chaotic outcomes of the protests in Hong Kong (e.g., the protests damaged Hong Kong's local economy, livelihood, and status as an international financial centre). On the other hand, SCMP emphasised the widespread opposition in Hong Kong society to the extradition bill and implicitly linked this grievance with the pervasive pressure that the Chinese central government has long exerted on the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (hereafter HKSAR) government. Nevertheless, the newspaper's coverage primarily focused on what the future of Hong Kong might

look like after the turmoil subsides, without showing clear bias toward either the government or the demonstrators (Cao et al., 2022).

Given those mentioned above, the argument of the thesis has been that SCMP would be a reasonable source for the stipulated aims here. Specifically, considering the outlet's longstanding reputation, neutral and objective editorial stance, and high news coverage credibility (Liu and Wang, 2022), SCMP is a justified data resource for analysing Hong Kong's complicated sociopolitical context. Moreover, the newspaper offers a rich corpus of texts that are both accessible and reflective of the broader discourse surrounding the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Overall, the comprehensive breadth and depth of SCMP's articles provides the essential insights into how the protests are framed and represented from the Hong Kong perspective for the degree of analysis sought in this research.

The initial research phase involved manually sifting through the SCMP's extensive catalogue from June to August 2019, a period that marked the height of the protests. This exhaustive examination resulted in the identification of 561 articles specifically pertinent to the protests. The sheer volume of relevant material from SCMP, compared to the articles from the People's Daily (PD) and China Daily (CD), presented a considerable challenge in distilling the information. Given the vastness of the material, it became essential to refine the selection to create a more manageable dataset for an in-depth analysis. Ultimately, five of the 561 articles were meticulously chosen (see 4.4) based on their relevance to the themes and arguments highlighted in section 4.2 of this research. These selected articles reflected the broader themes and discourses in the more expansive dataset and provided comprehensive insights into the SCMP's representation and interpretation of the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

3.6.3 Chinese Social Media Data: WeChat and Weibo

Social media played a significant role in organising, documenting, and assembling of the 2019 Hong Kong protests on a large scale. From Chinese aspect, this thesis collected data from WeChat and Weibo. The above social media platforms were chosen because they are considered as the battleground of the public opinions in terms of the protests. Compared to Chinese state media data which collected from June to August 2019 (see 3.4.1), social media data were collected from June to December 2019 as the researcher found there is latency for social media data which represented

both Self and Other in terms of the protests. On the other hand, the protests saw an escalation in the aftermath of the political events, and their repercussions in the public sphere producing salient social media boycott campaigns which are worthy to be investigated.

Data researching was done manually in the above social media platforms, by perusing the top-most photos, posts, hashtags and tweets associated with the protests. During data selection, the 'historicity of the web' problem was evident. According to KhosraviNik and Unger (2015), this problem exists because sites and texts are changing continuously, which may lead to a broader issue of 'transparency and replicability of data selection and analysis for CDA' (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2015: 209). However, the researcher followed a systematic data selection process which was also context-sensitive along with the thesis's problem-oriented research agenda.

For this thesis, the researcher collected articles from WeChat Public Account whose authentication is personal, and with "100K+" views between June to December 2019 through searching keyword "Hong Kong". The reason to choose and analyse "100K+" views articles, is the researcher thinks these articles may have had a significant influence in shaping public opinions considering in China, the protests were such a dominant event during the above period of time. Through analysis, I found 1304 original articles (Public Account articles) meet the criteria. The distribution of the articles over time is shown in Figure 3-1 (see overleaf).

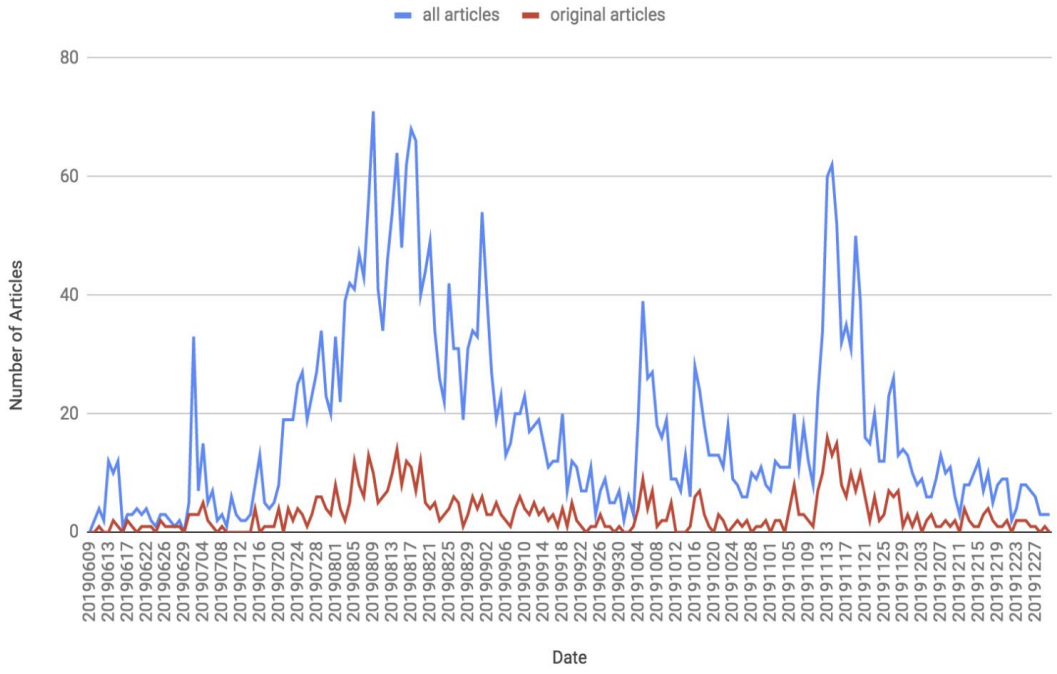

Figure 3-1 Articles from WeChat Public Account on Hong Kong protests between June and December (Source: Wu, 2020: 14)

In general, the discussion in terms of the 2019 Hong Kong protests was pretty low on Chinese social media in June (Wu, 2020; also see 5.2.1 for more details). The first spike appeared on 2 July, following the protestors' break-in and vandalisation of the LegCo on 1 July, which marked the 22nd anniversary of Hong Kong's handover to China. Since then, the Public Account articles in terms of the protests were steadily soared up, until reaching the highest viewing record on 9th August (Wu, 2020). Several days later, the second peak appeared because of one Chinese state media (i.e., The Global Times) journalist, Fu Guohao, was beaten by the protestors at the Hong Kong International Airport due to Fu's action and expression of supporting the police (for more details, please see 5.2.2). After that incident, attention from Chinese social media regarding the protests slowly decreased until October, which marked the third peaking wave as the SAR government forbade the protestors from wearing face coverings. Although the intensity of WeChat articles in terms of the Hong Kong protests surged once again in the mid of November due to the rapidly increasing conflicts on campuses and universities, public attention was lowered throughout December until the COVID-19 outbreaks (see 1.2, for detailed discussion the background of the protests).

The aforementioned 1304 original articles are posted by 356 unique Public Accounts, their types ranging from Politics and Current Affairs to Culture, Life and Entertainment, etc. In the above accounts, government bodies run the most politics accounts, while a

great number of current affairs accounts and media accounts are operated by relevant media organisations (i.e., state/non-state media) (Wu, 2020). The remaining accounts are called ‘Self-media’, which are independently operated platforms managed by individual WeChat users in China (Yu, 2018; cited from Wu, 2020: 15). A more detailed information of these accounts and articles is listed as follows (see Table 3-2 below):

Type of the Accounts	Accounts Number	Articles Number
Government	12	52
Media	54	546
Individual	290	706

Table 3-2 Distribution of WeChat Account and Articles (Partly referenced from Wu (2020)

As mentioned before, the CCP implemented tightened censorship on social media platforms (see 2.3.6). If a WeChat article is censored by the platform, the content of the article will show that “this content is unavailable for violation of related law and regulations”, but the title of the article and its link could still be found in WeChat database (Wu, 2020). As aforementioned (see 2.3.6), according to King, Pan and Roberts (2017), the CCP is good at posting and fabricating social media comments as if ordinary people wrote them. Nevertheless, instead of discussing controversial issues, these fabricated comments are focused on cheerleading the government’s achievements. Considering the data from WeChat in this thesis is chosen based on how many times an article was viewed and liked by ordinary people rather than the number of comments, thus, the data is arguably reflecting the honest opinions from the general public regarding the protests instead of the CCP’s fabrication or manipulation.

At the same time, embarking on data collection from Weibo about the 2019 Hong Kong protests posed significant challenges due to Weibo’s intricate algorithm and the looming presence of state-led censorship compared to WeChat. In the context of this thesis objectives, I conducted a comprehensive search on Weibo using tailored Keywords: *Hong Kong*, *protests*, and *2019* and confined the timeframe from June to December, which produced hundreds of thousands of pertinent posts. After reading and skimming these posts, I distilled the overarching sentiments and identified some salient themes, which will be illustrated in 5.2. However, several posts, especially those that appeared sympathetic to the protests, were censored or expunged, casting shadows over the comprehensiveness of the dataset. Amid this background, to

circumvent the accessibility barriers (of these deleted posts) I faced while overseas, I incorporated insights from Qian (2020)'s study titled "A Content Analysis of Chinese Weibo Posts About 2019-20 Hong Kong Demonstrations". Qian's meticulous curation of primary data related to the protests on Weibo immensely supplemented my findings. His work augmented this thesis's depth, rendering it richer in texture and more comprehensive in scope.

3.6.4 Western Social Media Data: Twitter and Facebook

From Western social media platforms, data was collected from June to September 2019, a pivotal period during the Hong Kong protests on Twitter and Facebook. In 2022, Facebook leads the global social media sphere with a staggering 2.91 billion active users, much more than Twitter's 436 million user base (Datareportal, 2022). The data collection strategy differed across these two platforms. On Twitter, the researcher focused on reviewing tweets and collected hashtags in terms of the protests, such as #antiELABMovement, #HongKongProtests, #SOSHK, #FreeHongKong, #StandWithHongKong, #FreeHongKongRevolutionOurTimes. By counting these hashtags, the researcher selected the first three hashtags after each tweet and listed them in Table 3-3 (see the following page), which formed the foundation of analysis in section 6.2.1. While on Facebook, the approach-centred on identifying key themes after reading and skimming posts which relevant to the protests, further will be elucidated in section 6.2.2.

Hashtags	Number of Tweets
#antiELABMovement	48,761
#StandWithHongKong	32,573
#FreeHongKongRevolutionOurTimes	29,075

Table 3-3 The Three Most Twitter Hashtags And Number of Tweets

In order to avoid bias, the study focuses on Hong Kong netizens' representation of the protests on Twitter, as Hong Kong is the central of the protests, thus the Hong Kongers may express their honest/neutral feeling of the protests compared to China (i.e., the CCP's propaganda and brainwash) and the West. Both posts on Facebook and hashtags on Twitter generated a large number of discussions and/or responses from ordinary netizens regarding the protests. The majority type of discussion includes (1). Pictures and videos, which presented turmoil and chaotic in the scene of the protests;

and (2). Share/retweet of news reports from mainstream media; as well as (3). Social media users' generated comments in terms of the protests. Most of these were published by real netizens, who actively share, engage with, and contribute to the discussion/response on these platforms, although a small number of contents involve misinformation and propaganda. However, it is impossible to determine whether this misinformation and propaganda came from real person (i.e., grand external propagandist from the CCP) who wish to cause political turbulence, or not. As the researcher could not find their detailed information from these platforms. Through analysis, the researcher gains understanding of their opinions associated with the protest which are different from the Chinese side.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the concept and content of CDA and how relevant data in the Chinese state and social media, and Western social media platforms are collected. CDA is highly relevant to this study and appropriate for this thesis as it links meaning to power. Moreover, there are three distinct motivations for incorporating CDA in this study. Firstly, CDA showcases the preference for political research. Drawing influence from Marxist theory and particularly the Frankfurt School, CDA has 'political leaning' (Breeze, 2011: 498, cited from Liu, 2019: 76). In addition, CDA theorists do not observe and interpret, which is commonly found in natural scientists who strive for "neutrality" and "objectivity". Instead, they point out these concealed problems, assess them, and provide guidance on how to deal with them. Against this backdrop, CDA is a 'critical' and 'normative' approach, advocating intervention when problems are identified (Liu, 2019). However, some critics such as Widdowson (1995, 2004) and Shi (2014) are sceptical of CDA's political tendencies and suggest that CDA may not be suitable to analyse discourse at all times (also see 3.2).

Secondly, as previously discussed, the CCP has never concealed its intention that the primary obligation of the Chinese media is to be loyal to the Party and has not been shied from admitting that media control and manipulation serve the Party's purpose (Liu, 2019: 77; also see 2.3). Thus, CDA is appropriate in this study as this thesis aims to demonstrate how the CCP manipulates Chinese state media and censors social media, to reinforces Chinese national identity construction, hence propagating a legitimate Self and delegitimate Other during the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

Thirdly, CDA is transdisciplinary and has an inextricable relationship between ideology, power, identity and discourse. CDA views ideologies as essential for social representation and construction to help the dominant social groups reproduce, maintain and legitimate the unequal power in the society, “the relation of dominance and exploitation” (Fairclough et al., 2011: 485). Ideologies also formulate the social in-groups and out-groups, such as Us vs Them. In-group members and values are positively revealed in discourse in contrast to the negative presentation of the outgroup community and their ideologies (van Dijk, 1997). The covert ideologies are manifested and enacted by the contextual use of language (Foucault, 1972; van Dijk, 1995). Examining the linguistic features of discourse and the interpretation of word use in social-political contexts could ensure the unravelling of ideologies legitimising social dominance. It has been accepted that the critical nature of CDA is activated by the goal of unfolding ideological implications of discourse (Fairclough, 1995; Teo, 2000). As van Dijk (1995) states, discourse analysis in a critical paradigm can make the ideological underpinnings in text opaque.

Hence, by utilising CDA in this thesis, the researcher potentially makes the whole analysis more comprehensive by critically analysing different media discourses in terms of the 2019 Hong Kong protesters. Thus, the following three chapters will analyse and discuss media discourse from the Chinese and the West media platforms (i.e., Chinese state media discourse in Chapter 4 and Chinese social media discourse in Chapter 5, and social media discourse from the West platforms in Chapter 6. The reason for doing this, is because the researcher mainly focuses on the Chinese side instead of comparing and contrasting the Chinese and the West media representations of this issue).

Chapter 4. Chinese State Media Discourses: Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter leverages CDA to delve deeper into the nuances of textual and linguistic choices evident in Chinese state media discourses surrounding the 2019 Hong Kong protests. In doing so, the aim is to decipher those intricate discourses which contribute to the Chinese national identity construction and fortify the political legitimacy of the CCP. As aforementioned (see 3.5), this chapter's data selection is not unilateral to ensure a comprehensive analysis. While the primary spotlight is on the Chinese state media, a conscious effort has been made to juxtapose this with media output from Hong Kong. This juxtaposition serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it enriches the analysis by offering a comparative lens, elucidating how ideological variances between the two regions dictate divergent media representations of the same event (see 3.5). Secondly, it provides a fertile ground for understanding the dynamics of Self and Other in discourse, which are crucial for further understanding identity construction and legitimacy.

As previously underscored in Chapter 2 (see 2.3), it is paramount to acknowledge that the Chinese state media operates under the severe control of the CCP, either directly or indirectly. Consequently, the narratives and representations projected by these outlets can mirror the CCP's ideological stance and self-representation, especially in the context of the 2019 Hong Kong protests. This perspective becomes especially pivotal as these protests challenged the CCP's prevailing narratives on Hong Kong's autonomy and sovereignty in their essence and manifestation.

On the other hand, the media landscape in Hong Kong, albeit operating under the 'One Country, Two Systems' (OCTS) principle, enjoys a relatively higher degree of freedom compared to its mainland counterpart. This freedom manifests in its media discourses, offering alternative, sometimes contrarian narratives and perspectives. By factoring in these Other representations, this chapter provides a holistic understanding of the complex media discourses surrounding the protests.

To sum up, this chapter endeavours to present a detailed, CDA-informed analysis, juxtaposing the state-controlled narratives from China with those from a more liberal

media environment (i.e.., Hong Kong), shedding light on the intricate interplay of identity, legitimacy, and power in the representations of the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

4.2 Discursive Themes and Argumentation from Chinese State Media

Upon an exhaustive skimming and reading of the 123 articles sourced from the People's Daily (PD) and China Daily (CD), as detailed in section 3.5.1, I discerned two recurrent discursive themes employed by the Chinese state media when the CCP confronts internal or external crises. These overarching themes are (1). Nationalism; and (2). Rule and Law. Subsequently, five primary argumentations were identified that resonate with these dominant themes: (1). Justification for repression (emphasis on rule and law); (2). Marginalised the protestors (emphasis on rule and law); (3). Stress the large scale and impact of the protests (emphasis on both themes); (4). Focus on violence by protestors (emphasis on rule and law); and (5). Blame the Western interference (emphasis on nationalism).

As mentioned in 3.5.1, the researcher finally picked ten representative news articles from a total of 123 pieces, comprising five each from the PD and CD. This refined selection was curated to encompass diverse article types, such as commentaries and editorials, which aptly embodied the aforementioned discursive themes and argumentations. Table 4-1, on the subsequent page, offers a comprehensive breakdown of these articles, detailing their source, type, topic, argumentations/discursive themes and date.

Source	Type	Topic	Argumentations/Discursive themes (see brackets)	Date
PD	Article	Hong Kong protests turn violent, several policemen injured	Focus on violence by protestors (Rule and Law)	26th August 2019
PD	Article	Any attempts to disrupt Hong Kong's prosperity, stability doomed to failure: spokesperson	Blame the Western interference (Nationalism)	14th June 2019
PD	Editorial	Protesters hold unauthorised rally in Hong Kong airport, upset passengers	Stress the large scale and impact of the protests (Nationalism and Rule and Law)	10th August 2019
PD	Editorial	Hong Kong police charge 45 people following illegal assembly	Marginalised the protestors (Rule and Law)	31st July 2019
PD	Comment	Violence must be punished to safeguard Hong Kong stability	Justification for repression (Rule and Law)	3rd July 2019
CD	Article	How violence has disrupted Hong Kong over the last two months	Stress the large scale and impact of the protests (Nationalism and Rule and Law)	18th August 2019
CD	Article	Unlawful rally turns radical in Hong Kong	Focus on violence by protestors (Rule and Law)	27th July 2019
CD	Editorial	Rule of law is Hong Kong's most valuable possession: China Daily editorial	Justification for repression (Rule and Law)	29th July 2019
CD	Editorial	Hong Kong police arrest 148 suspects in Monday's operations	Marginalised the protestors (Rule and Law)	6th August 2019
CD	Comment	Closing of extradition loophole strengthens rule of law in HK	Blame the Western interference (Nationalism)	9th June 2019

Table 4-1 Chinese state media data from the People's Daily (PD) and China Daily (CD)

4.3 CDA Analysis: The Chinese Side

This section delves into the potential impact of state media propaganda on the perceptions of ordinary Chinese citizens in the context of the 2019 Hong Kong protests. As mentioned previously, the PD and CD manifested two discursive themes when reporting on the protests (see 4.2). I systematically unpack these themes by employing CDA and DHA. These themes were identified via a methodological bottom-up data analysis, adopting a multileveled discursive strategy. Such an approach not only

empowers the in-depth exploration of the texts but also facilitates the interconnection of these texts with broader social practices. It is imperative to recognise that a holistic discourse processing model offers a more nuanced understanding than merely dissecting isolated textual facets. This necessitates that the analysis remains anchored in context, elucidating the potential influences of these discourses. Notably, the themes from the Chinese state media discourse underscore the illuminated deep-seated identity conflicts between mainland Chinese and Hong Kongers, posing a significant challenge to the CCP's governing authority. This is despite the presumed official Chinese sovereignty over Hong Kong.

In the context of this thesis, the selected analytical strategies of presupposition, lexical choices, metaphor, metonymy, mitigation (see 3.4.5), overstatement or intensification (see 3.4.5), deictics become instrumental in decoding the intricate layers of the discourse. As Richardson (2007: 63) argues, the presupposition is 'a taken-for-granted, implicit claim embedded within the explicit meaning of a text or utterances'. This tool is used to critically determine the type of meaning assumed in the text so that the researcher can determine the presupposed content that might have been taken for granted but promotes specific interests and ideologies. Lexical analysis is almost the first stage to analyse any text or discourse in a newspaper; words convey the imprint of society and value judgments in particular - they convey 'connoted and denoted meanings' (Richardson, 2007: 63).

Metaphor and metonymy, though seemingly intertwined, have distinctive analytical roles. While metaphor predicates understanding one concept in the light of another, metonymy functions through association, as Jasinski underscores (2001: 551), 'is a form of substitution in which something associated with X is substituted for X'. For example, the Chinese state media articles sometimes blamed the protestors as 'Western puppets'. Here, the metonymic phrase 'Western puppets' does not literally mean puppets from the West. Instead, it is an associative term implying that Western powers control or influence the protestors. The actual entities (i.e., the protestors) are substituted by something closely associated with them, as the media suggests, the so-called Western affiliations or influences. Deictics, in discourse analysis, is an indicative linguistic tool anchoring speech in time, place, or context. Its role in contextualising discourse cannot be understated, offering listeners or readers cues about the speaker's positioning. By applying these strategies, the upcoming sections endeavour to meticulously dissect the discourse the Chinese state media propagated concerning

the 2019 Hong Kong protests, to elaborate on how the intricate linguistic and rhetorical mechanisms shape public perceptions, frame ideological boundaries, and bolster the political legitimacy of the CCP.

As previously stated, (see 2.3.1), the Chinese state media is the mouthpiece and highly controlled by the CCP, and the CCP through manipulates media discourse to propagate its policies during the crisis. Thus, by analysing the five arguments mentioned in 4.2, the following sections focus on elaborate how the pro-CCP's media discourse (i.e., the PD and the CD) legitimise the CCP, and delegitimise Other alternative narratives during the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

4.3.1 Justification of Repression

The PD published a comment on 4th July 2019, titled "Violence must be punished to safeguard Hong Kong stability", said:

> (1). Some protesters were *storming* the region's Legislative Council (LegCo)...The violent acts *severely challenged* the **rule of law** in Hong Kong, *jeopardised* the social stability of Hong Kong and *blatantly challenged* the bottom line of "One country, Two systems." The (Chinese) central government *resolutely supports* HKSAR Chief Executive Carrie Lam and the HKSAR government to exercise their duty, *investigate* and *punish* the violations, and *protect* social order and public safety…A society **ruled by law** needs to accommodate different voices, but it does not mean that a few people can carry out *illegal* acts, nor that *violent crime* should be tolerated. Laws are to be abided by, and lawbreakers must be *punished*. Only by *safeguarding* the authority of law and *defending* the dignity of law can we ensure the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong, as well as the stability of the country (PD, 4th July 2019; my emphasis).

While the CD published an editorial on 29th July 2019, titled "Rule of law is Hong Kong's most valuable possession: China Daily editorial", it mentioned:

> (2). No society under the rule of law will tolerate *rampant violence*, a spokesperson said, calling on all sectors of Hong Kong society to "*clearly oppose* violence", "*strongly uphold* the **rule of law**" and end the *political gridlock* to focus on economic development and improving people's livelihoods…The rule of law is a *core value* Hong Kong people revere and defend like a *faith* as it is the *strongest*

> *pillar* that underpins the city's global competitiveness. Any further *erosion* of it could herald a permanent decline for the city…Maintaining social *harmony* and *stability* serves the *interests* of all in Hong Kong. It is also a *prerequisite* for addressing the *deep-seated problems* that have built up over a long period of time. If the disorder persists, it will be the whole of Hong Kong society that *pays the price* (CD, 29th July 2019; my emphasis).

It is noteworthy that the first comment from the PD was published just three days after the 22nd anniversary of Hong Kong's handover (i.e., 1st July 2019) to China. By creating a harmonious and cordial atmosphere at the beginning of the comment, the PD said, "People from all walks of life in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) were *immersed* in festivities commemorating the return of Hong Kong to the *motherland* and the establishment of the HKSAR on July 1", the comment changed its tone dramatically by using intensification and mitigation strategy, intensifying the level of violation caused by the protestors, and emphasising notions such as rule and law several times (i.e., the rule of law, ruled by law, safeguarding the authority of law, defending the dignity of law) and intensified the CCP's positive attitude toward the HKSAR government (i.e., resolutely supports CE Carrie Lam to investigate and punish violations), which indicated that the Chinese government/the CCP would not stand by the protests and protestors' violent action damaged the Hong Kong's stability and prosperity, such as *storming* the LegCo, *jeopardised* social stability, *challenged* the bottom line of the OCTS. By mentioning the OCTS as the bottom line, the comment from one side, indicated the CCP's panic and anger due to the protests, as the protests have challenged the CCP's legitimacy to rule in Hong Kong.

From another side, the comment subtly mitigated the 'real' meaning of rule and law in Hong Kong (i.e., Hong Kong's basic law) and the concept of OCTS (i.e., Two systems, which suggests it is reasonable for Hong Kong to have different social and political systems in comparison to China, according to the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration), and substitute these concepts from the Chinese perspectives and incorporated with the CCP's ideologies, which suggested the existence of unequal power between China and Hong Kong behind the protests. In addition, the comment also mitigates Hong Kong's public reaction in terms of the CCP/the HKSAR government's response to the protests, hence legitimate and justifying the CCP's repression and delegitimate the protests/protestors.

The CD's editorial was several days later than the PD's. Like its peer, the CD also mentioned the notions of rule and law (e.g., the editorial's topic). By applying an intensification strategy, on the one hand, the CD emphasised the worrying situation caused by the protestors, such as using the terms *rampant violence*, (political) *gridlock* and *erosion*; the CCP hinted that the nature of protests has changed. Instead of just pursuing the HKSAR government to withdraw the extradition bill, what the protestors really called were safeguarding Hong Kong's democracy and freedom and requesting political reform (i.e., universal suffrage). Moreover, if the protests persist, they may lead to severe outcomes and finally challenge the CCP's authority to rule in Hong Kong.

On the other hand, the CCP intensified the importance of rule and law, such as using terms *core value*, *strongest pillar*, *harmony*, *stability* and *prerequisite*, which suggested the CCP's wish to reduce damage due to the protests and restore peace in Hong Kong. In the meantime, the CCP deliberately mitigates some notions, such as *interests* and *deep-seated problems* in Hong Kong, which indicates that the whole of Hong Kong society has mutual interests from one point, but also exists some problems for an extended period of time. Nevertheless, the CCP did not clearly elaborate on what these interests and the problems are. Instead, it just mentioned that harmony and stability sever the interests of all in Hong Kong, and only by abode the rule and law first (i.e., prerequisite), these deep-rooted problems may be solved. In addition, in the last sentence of the editorial, the CCP warned that relevant protestors would be punished (i.e., *pay the price*) if the protests continue. These narratives indicated the CCP's condescending attitude toward the HKSAR government and the Hong Kong society, and its arrogant hegemony in Hong Kong. In the meantime, by utilising mitigation strategy, the CCP subtly transfer Hong Kong's social conflicts and public's vision from focusing on the CCP/HKSAR government's cruel repression of the protests, to the protesters' violent action and their jeopardise to the society, hence represent Self as legitimate, and Other as delegitimate.

To sum up, both the PD and the CD's comments indicated that there is a stark contrast between the CCP's intensification (i.e., protests' seriousness/the rule of law) and mitigation (i.e., the OCTS/Hong Kong's basic law/deep-seated problems in Hong Kong). By using these discursive strategies, the CCP intensified the severeness of the protests and protestors' brutality, hence legitimate Self side action of repression of the demonstrations in the name of restoring Hong Kong's stability and harmony. On the other hand, the CCP mitigated/twisted the cornerstone concept such as the OCTS, the

basic law in Hong Kong, effectively transferred the public's eyes to the protests *per se* and the protestors' damage to Hong Kong's society, thus delegitimate Other and reduced public attention to the CCP/HKSAR government's bloody handling of the protests.

4.3.2 Marginalising the Protestors

The PD published an editorial on 31st July 2019, titled "Hong Kong police charge 45 people following illegal assembly", wrote:

> (3). Police force of China's Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) said on Tuesday that *45* people were charged with rioting, assaulting police officer and possession of offensive weapons respectively after a recent illegal assembly…Although the police repeatedly asked the protesters who charged the police cordon lines to leave the illegal assembly immediately, the protesters continued to perform various peace-breaching acts and attacked police officers. After repeated warnings were ignored, the police took dispersal action at around 7 p.m. on Sunday to restore social order, during which the police arrested *49* people including *32* men and *17* women, aged between 16 and 41. After investigation and seeking legal advice, the police charged *44* people for rioting. Among them, a 33-year-old man was also charged with assaulting police officer[s]. Separately, a 24-year-old man was charged with possession of offensive weapons. All of them will appear in court on Wednesday. The police stressed that an investigation was underway and did not rule out the possibility of *further arrest* (PD, 31st July 2019; my emphasis).

An editorial from the CD on 6th August 2019, titled "Hong Kong police arrest 148 suspects in Monday's operations", also focused on the marginalise the protestors. It said:

> (4). The Hong Kong police said on Tuesday that they have arrested *148* people during Monday's operations. The detainees consist of *95* males and *53* females, four of whom have been charged, said the police at a press briefing…At the press briefing on Monday, the Hong Kong police said that they had arrested *420* people during a series of protests and clashes between 9th June and 5th August 2019. They were charged with taking part in riot, unlawful assembly, assaulting police and other offensives (CD, 6th August 2019; my emphasis).

From the above two media reports, it appears that the Chinese state media were intentionally downplaying the scale of the protests; even the protests gained momentum in the mid of June 2019 (i.e., more than 2 million people participated in the demonstrations on 16th June). By mitigating the number of the protestors (i.e., 45 people were charged according to the PD, and 148 suspects were arrested based on the CD), the Chinese state media's intent to demobilise the protests by representing the protestors were just a small group of marginal members, or the minority of the society, hence, to delegitimise Other by fearing dissidents who wish to promote Hong Kong's democracy and freedom through contentious action (i.e., protests). In addition, mitigating the number of protestors indicated that everything is under the control of the CCP, which on the one hand, would reduce anticipation of the dissidents, and on the other hand, enhance the public's agglomerate to the authoritarian regime (e.g., support the CCP's suppression of the protests due to the minority of protestors). According to Ma and Weiss (2023), the CCP has a tradition of doing this historically. For instance, during the 1989 Tiananmen square massacre, the CCP's then-Prime Minister Li Peng described the incident as a conspiracy initiated by "a tiny group of individuals", and the following took the bloody slaughter of the student protestors. In a similar situation, the current CCP's leadership under Xi Jinping has often chosen to depict unrest in Tibet, Xinjiang, and even the 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong as unpopular and limited in impact (Ma and Weiss, 2023: 111). By doing this, the Chinese party-state has sought to convey to the opponents that their efforts through mobilise/protests to challenge the CCP's authority to rule and the status quo will not threaten the regime's stability and the political legitimacy of the CCP due to China's strong state capacity. Instead, all protesters playing with fire will pay the price for challenging the authoritarian regime and the CCP.

4.3.3 Impact of the Protests

The PD published an editorial on 10th August 2019, titled "Protesters hold unauthorised rally in Hong Kong airport, upset passengers", indicated the large scale of the protests and its serious outcome to the society. The editorial said:

> (5). **Several thousand protesters** *thronged* into Hong Kong airport on Friday without reporting with the police in advance, putting pressure on the airport… The *black-clad* demonstrators, who mostly wore masks, started to sit on the ground of

> the arrival hall of the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) at noon, *shouting* out anti-government slogans…Several civil aviation workers groups on Friday issued statements to oppose the rally, saying it is illegal and will *damage* Hong Kong's *image* and *the economy*. They also called on residents in Hong Kong not to participate in the rally...**Several protesters** waved U.S. and British flags. A woman in white questioned the behaviour in Cantonese and called them "*traitors*". "You are Chinese. You are Hong Kong residents. You should love the place and mustn't *mess up* the place," said the woman (PD, 10th August 2019; my emphasis).

While the CD's article on 18th August 2019 titled "How violence has disrupted Hong Kong over last 2 months", listed several key time-nodes of the protests with photo (see Figure 4-1), suggested that the protests had "Challenging government authority", "Disturbing social order", "Undermining the OCTS principle", "Pushing Hong Kong to brink". The article mentioned the following:

> (6). Challenging government authority - The demonstrations, which started in June, repeatedly became violent clashes under the instigation of individuals with ulterior motives. **Some radicals** repeatedly mounted attacks on police. They *surrounded* Hong Kong police headquarters, *disrupted* government agencies and *ransacked* the Legislative Council (LegCo) building. On July 1, **rioters** *blocked* roads and threw corrosive liquids at police officers. They *ransacked* the LegCo building and *assailed* police with toxic chemical powder. They *extensively damaged* the council chamber, *defaced* HKSAR regional emblem, *tore up* the Basic Law, *waved* a colonial-era flag and even called for an establishment of a so-called "*interim government*".
>
> Disturbing social order - Hong Kong's social disorder worsened in July, as **aggressive members** *unlawfully assembled* or *launched* more demonstrations in various districts of Hong Kong. Violence spread further, affecting the normal lives of more residents. On July 27, though the Hong Kong police had issued a notice of objection, **some people** *assembled illegally* at the Yuen Long district. **A group of radical protesters** illegally *cut off traffic*, *sieged police vehicles*, *smashed car windows* and *smeared cars* with *insulting words*. Police officers were deployed at the village entrances to prevent conflicts between protesters and villagers. **Several radical protesters** also *sieged* the Yuen Long police station, forcing the

report room to suspend service. Opposition lawmakers were once again present to support the violent acts.

Undermining the OCTS principle - **A group of extreme radicals** *stormed* the offices of the Central Government in Hong Kong, *insulted* the national emblem and flag of China, *undermined* national sovereignty and dignity and the “One country, Two systems” principle. On July 21, **radical protesters** *besieged and attacked* the Liaison Office of the Central People’s Government, *defaced* the national emblem in front of the building by hurling eggs and black paintballs, *damaged* security facilities and *scrawled* graffiti insulting the nation.

Pushing Hong Kong to brink - Violence and chaos escalated in August as **mobsters** used guerrilla tactics to stage strikes, block public transport, prevent residents from going to work, *damage* public facilities, *siege* police stations and *attack* police officers across Hong Kong, pushing the city to the brink. On Aug 5, **flash mobs** *stirred up* trouble across Hong Kong. They *destroyed* public facilities, including roadside railings, sidewalk bricks, traffic bollards and lights. As a result, 36 roads and the Cross-Harbour Tunnel were blocked, 96 buses suspended or rerouted, 8 MTR lines obstructed, and more than 200 flights cancelled (CD, 18th August 2019; my emphasis).

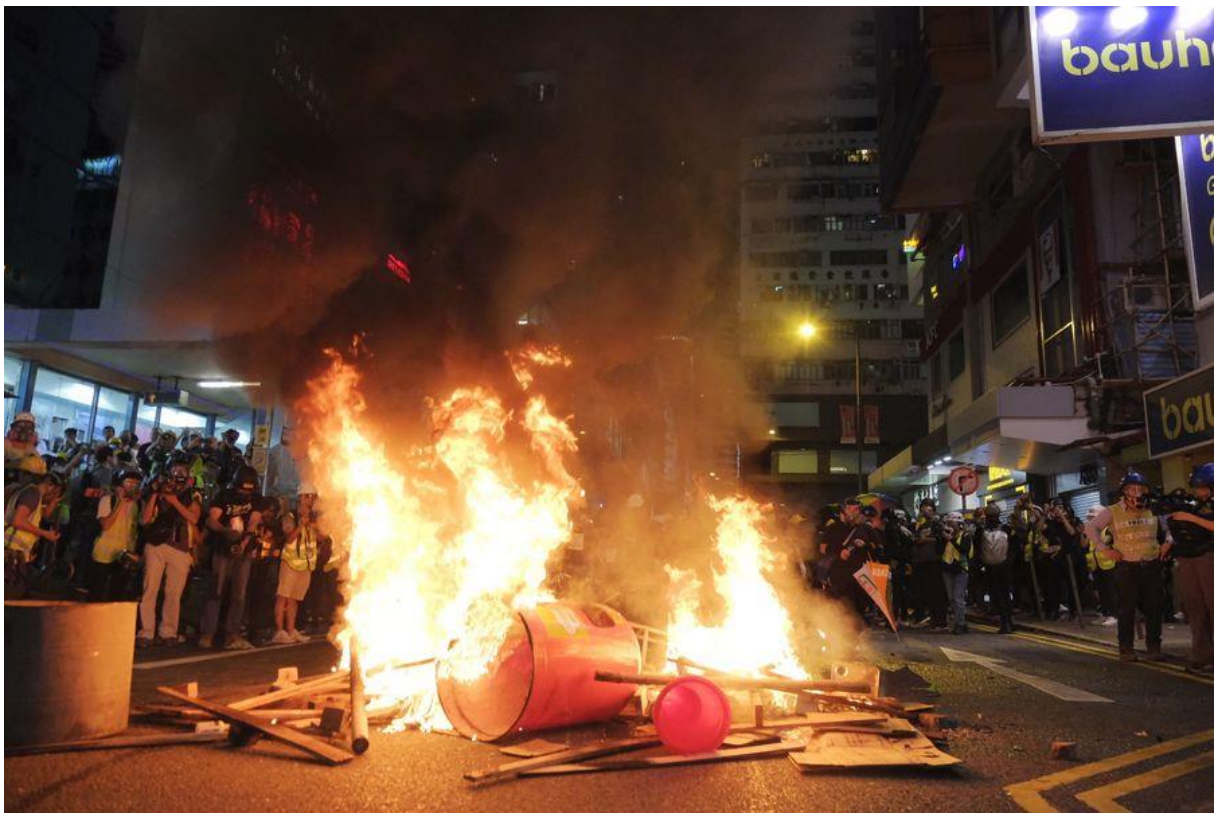

Figure 4-1 Violent radicals set fires after blocking a road in Causeway Bay, South China's Hong Kong (Source: Xinhua News Agency, 4th August 2019).

The photo above evidently captures a scene of chaos and disruption. The act of setting fires is a powerful and symbolic one; it not only causes physical destruction but also serves as a strong metaphor for disorder, resistance, and dissent. The use of the term 'violent radicals' from Chinese state media underscores a specific perspective on these individuals, framing them as aggressive and potentially dangerous. The low saturated colours in the background, foregrounds the fire and bricks and assists the viewers to encode the reality of the circumstances of the image, i.e. accident scene as its location. But the picture just mentioned "violent radicals set fires" without showing where these protestors are, or whether any people support them or not. By deliberately omitted the key elements of the protests (i.e., protestors and other spectators), this image indicates Chinese state media's representation of delegitimise the protests (Other) and hence legitimise Self. According to Wodak et al. (2009), 'Self' is generally occupying the dominant position of centred, while 'Other' are in a de-decentred inferior position (i.e., Self is legitimate, Other is delegitimate). The construction of self-identity incorporates the construction of identity of Other, which included the constant interpretation and reinterpretation of the different qualities of Self (Wodak et al., 2009). This emphasises the importance of discourse in identity constructing in the confrontation between Self

and Other.

The two media reports from the Chinese state media also proved the aforementioned Self and Other theory, by applying several discursive strategies. Firstly, nomination and presupposition strategies, such as nominating and presupposing the protestors as “traitors”, “rioters”, “aggressive members”, “a group of/several (extreme) radical(s)”, “flash mobs” to indicate the size and large scale of the protests, thus delegitimise the protestors by “emphasises negative things about Them” (van Dijk, 1998: 44). In addition, by using negative verbs (e.g., shout/disrupt/ransack/(be)siege/smash/smear, see above italic words) to represent the protestors, the state-run media’s narratives intensified the protestors’ violent action, which suggested the unprecedentedly huge and dangerous impact of the protests. As Ma and Weiss (2023: 112) state, autocrats (e.g., the CCP) who seeking to de-legitimise democratic mobilisation (e.g., the 2019 Hong Kong protests) may emphasise the scale and the intensity of democratic protests, in hopes of promoting the rally effect (e.g., reinforce domestic support) from the regime supporters, who share concerns about the aggrandisement of Western democracy.

Coincidentally, at the end of the article, the CD concluded: “The ordinance amendment issues have changed in their essence and now bear the features of a “colour revolution” (CD, 2019). The narrative of the protests has “changed its essence and become a colour revolution” is a fallacy, but it has been widely circulated in China. As a matter of fact, the Chinese media has frequently adopted this strategy to combating the previous social movements (Ma and Weiss, 2023). For instance, the PD published an article in 2014 titled “Why the US is so keen on ‘the colour revolution’?” to discredit the authenticity of the 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong (Hua, 2014). By promoting stories about Western countries supporting and sponsoring pro-democratic protests elsewhere and accusing them of transgressing principles of state sovereignty and non-interference, Chinese state media directs discussion away from the normative meaning of democracy and encourages pro-regime citizens to speak up in favour of protecting territory and sovereignty integrity. In this way, on the one hand, the CCP has unified Chinese national identity construction. On the other hand, the CCP also justified its suppression of the protests (see 4.3.1.1), hence legitimising Self by “de-emphasises negative things about Us” (van Dijk, 1998: 44).

4.3.4 Focus on Protestors' Violence

The PD's article titled "Hong Kong protests turn violent, several policemen injured", strategically portrayed and focused on how violent the protestors did. The article said:

> (7). Protests turned violent in Tsuen Wan, in the western New Territories of Hong Kong, on Sunday as some radical protesters *hurled* bricks and petrol bombs at police officers outside Yeung Uk Road Market in Tsuen Wan. They also aimed strong light beams at the officers and setting up barricades to confront the police. Masked protesters, armed with poles and hats blocked various roads in Tsuen Wan, *paralysing* traffic in the vicinity. At around 7:30 p.m., many masked demonstrators who had been dispersed gathered again…holding iron bars, wooden sticks and bricks. They *smashed* doors and windows of several shops and *broke* some closed-circuit televisions. About half an hour later, several anti-riot police officers arrived at the scene where shops were vandalised and were immediately *surrounded* and *assaulted* brutally by a large group of masked radicals holding long metal rods. With only *small shields* for defence, the police officers *tumbled* backward along the Sha Tsui Road, with the violent protesters *chasing* after them…These 'men in mask' are not ordinary protestors, but *murders* with *terrorist tendencies* (PD, 26th August 2019; my emphasis).

The CD's article, titled "Unlawful rally turns radical in Hong Kong", also emphasised the violent of the protestors with a photo (Figure 4-2, see below):

> (8). An *unauthorised* rally turned radical in Yuen Long on Saturday as protesters *attacked* a police vehicle and charged at the police cordon lines. The protesters were taking part in a march - from Shui Pin Tsuen Playground to Yuen Long MTR station - which was banned by the police on Thursday on safety concerns. An appeal board upheld the police's decision on Friday, on the grounds that it poses the risk of violent clashes between protesters and villagers in the district. At the same time, radical protesters at multiple locations near Yuen Long MTR station started to *throw* bottles, stools and other unidentified objects at the cordon line of the riot police. The police have fired several rounds of tear gas to the crowds (CD, 27th July 2019; my emphasis).

Figure 4-2 A protester (right) tries to attack riot police with an iron pole during an unauthorised assembly in Yuen Long, Hong Kong (Source: CD, 27th July 2019).

4.3.5 Western Interference and the Blame Game

The headline of the two above media articles indicates the Chinese state media delegitimise the protests by using negative words such as violence, unlawful, radicals, etc. The photo from the CD demonstrated that one protestor with black cloth, wearing a yellow helmet and goggles and gas mask, is attacking police with an iron pole, while the two struck riot polices only defending themselves with a plastic shield, which could not fully cover their body. Other police in the back and centre of the photo seemed indifferent to the two left colleagues but just vigilant to those taking photos. With the close-up shot technique, this picture also vividly represents of the protestors' violent behaviours.

In addition, by exaggerating and intensifying the severe actions of the protestors, for example, (the protestors) hurled bricks and petrol bombs, paralysing traffic, smashed doors, broke some close-circuit television, and even represented the protests as terrorism (e.g., murders with terrorist tendencies), the Chinese state-run media took the same reporting style to rebuke the protestors, by emphasising the negative side of Other since the protests begin (e.g., exaggerating the scale of the protests and serious outcomes caused by the protestors), which depicted the CCP's attitude to rally the public's support, hence to legitimise Self and delegitimise Other. At the same time, as Ma and Weiss (2023) note, by publishing more articles to demobilise the masses and

more discussion of repression and how protesters were unwelcome by the Hong Kong people, Chinese state media showed off the state's capacity to deter the opponents and rallying the public to defend their homeland against the threat of violent unrest and the so-called Western interference (i.e., colour revolution caused by the US), which is a common strategy and will be illustrated in the next sub-section when dealing with the previous social movement in Hong Kong (i.e., the 2014 Umbrella Movement, see 4.3.1.3).

Blaming the Western interference is a common technique used by Chinese state and social media/the CCP when dealing with the previous social movements (i.e., the 1989 Tiananmen massacre in China and the 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong) or even met with society internal contradictions, and it is no exception for the 2019 Hong Kong protests either. For example, the PD published an article on 14th June 2019, titled "Any attempts to disrupt Hong Kong's prosperity, stability doomed to failure: spokesperson". The article wrote:

> (9). In response to a question about some **members of the U.S. Congress** bringing up again an act regarding Hong Kong, spokesperson Geng Shuang said that China is *strongly dissatisfied* with and *firmly opposes* the U.S. making *irresponsible remarks* about Hong Kong and *grossly interfering* in China's internal affairs… Geng urged **relevant Americans** to *respect facts*, *discard prejudice*, *stop any attempts at interfering* in Hong Kong's affairs, *abandon delusions* of creating chaos in Hong Kong, *stop advancing* the review of relevant bill, *stop interfering* in China's internal affairs, and do more to facilitate mutual trust and cooperation between China and the United States. Geng said Hong Kong's affairs are purely China's internal affairs, which *brooks no interference* by any **foreign country**… "Any attempts to *create chaos* in Hong Kong and *disrupt its prosperity and stability* will certainly be opposed by all the Chinese people including Hong Kong compatriots," Geng said. "Such attempts will neither win popular consensus nor succeed" (PD, 14th June 2019; my emphasis).

While the CD's comment in terms of blaming the Western interference, titled "Closing of extradition loophole strengthens rule of law in HK", was published on 9th June 2019, several days before the PD's article. On the one hand, this comment taunting the protestors were manipulated by the foreign forces. On the other hand, it is also firmly against Western interference in Chinese internal affairs. The comment said:

(10). Some of them were apparently *misled* about the intentions of the changes while others were simply *manoeuvring* to promote a *political agenda*…The SAR government's proposed amendments to the existing rendition laws, whose legislative process is being delayed by opposition lawmakers' filibustering, will enable Hong Kong to return fugitives, on a case-by-case basis, to other parts of China, as well as to over 170 countries with which Hong Kong now has no extradition deals. Any *fair-minded* person would deem the amendment bill a legitimate, sensible and reasonable piece of legislation that would strengthen Hong Kong's rule of law and deliver justice. Unfortunately, some Hong Kong residents have been *hoodwinked* by the **opposition camp** and their **foreign allies** into supporting the anti-extradition campaign. They have failed to realise that the **opposition camp** is using them merely as *pawns* in its *manoeuvres* to *reap political gains* by damaging the SAR government's credibility and reputation, or that some **foreign forces** are *seizing the opportunity* to advance their own strategy to hurt China by trying to *create havoc* in Hong Kong (CD, 9th June 2019; my emphasis).

From the above state media articles, both the PD and CD indicated the CCP's attitude of firmly condemn and strongly against the so-called Western interference of Chinese internal affairs. The PD's article, especially intensified the negative role of the United States role in the protests (e.g., grossly interfering Chinese internal affairs), and by juxtapose the Chinese desire (e.g., respect facts, discard prejudice, abandon delusion, facilitate mutual trust) and the United States actual action (e.g., create chaos, disrupt prosperity and stability), the PD elaborated a vivid representation of the legitimate Self (i.e., Chinese/the CCP) and delegitimate Other (i.e., the US/foreign countries) by claiming that some foreign countries are trespassing on national sovereignty, showcasing that the Western support for the protests, but this support is just seek to benefit themselves (i.e., the West) rather than Hong Kong. Hence, the CCP instigated nationalism, thus united Chinese national identity construction and gained support from the general public, by emphasising "our good things" and "their bad things" (i.e., Us vs Them).

Although the CD's comment has some softener narrative styles (i.e., less criticise on Western interference) compared to the PD, it still mentioned Western forces interference is a main reason which led to the protests. However, what the comment focuses on, is trying to persuade or propagate the protestors. For instance, it applies

metaphor strategy to depict the protestors as pawns, which suggests they were blindly incited and/or bewitched by the foreign forces in order to split Hong Kong and China. In the meantime, what the Western aiders seek, is to benefit themselves instead of Hong Kong, and they do not care about the protests *per se* at all (i.e., reap political gains, advance their own strategy). In this way, this comment reflected that the CCP has incorporated ideologies in Chinese state media discourse, representing the protestors have threatened national unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity and state stability due to Western 'black hands', hence justified the CCP/the HKSAR government repression of the protests and represented Self (the CCP/the HKSAR government) as legitimate, and Other (the protestors) as delegitimate.

In addition, the terms manoeuvre(ing) and hoodwinked in this extract also elaborated Chinese state media's negative representation the protest/protestors, which indicated the protests triggered anger and anxiety and perceived threats to national unity and safety. However, by using mitigation strategy, this comment subtly mitigated the 'real face' about why the protests took place, what the protestors demand for, and where the CCP's authority to rule comes from. Instead, it intensified negative portraying of the protestors and condemned the foreign 'black hands' as the cause of unrest. While these practices sometimes result in positive short-term outcomes, they also enable autocrats (i.e., the CCP) to portray Western involvement not as assistance to home-grown movements (i.e., the 2019 Hong Kong protests) but as outside instigators, which suggests 'Western countries' promoting regional separatism in the name of democratisation' (Ma and Weiss, 2023: 111). In doing this, the CCP successfully incited nationalism and diverted general public's attention by accusing the protests were caused by foreign interference in Chinese internal affairs, and criticising the protestors destroyed peace and stability in Hong Kong. Hence, the CCP rallies supporters of the regime and transferred people's eye from focusing on the nature of protests to its side-effects. For example, the protests affected every aspect of the society, from economic growth to social stability in Hong Kong.

4.4 Selected Articles From the SCMP

To maintain a comprehensive and balanced perspective between the mainland China and Hong Kong narratives, as previously mentioned in section 3.5, the researcher incorporated data from the SCMP for meticulous analysis. However, it is imperative to note that the primary emphasis of this thesis orbits around the Self-representation of

the protests from the vantage point of China. Consequently, while the representative data from Hong Kong, specifically from the SCMP, is undeniably invaluable for an enriched comparative discourse, the quantity of this data was intentionally kept relatively concise.

From the voluminous archive of SCMP articles published between June to August 2019, 561 pieces were identified as intrinsically linked to the Hong Kong protests. Embarking on a rigorous selection and content distillation process, the final five pieces were chosen to ensure these articles resonate with the aforementioned themes and arguments, as detailed in section 4.2. This selection juxtaposed against the total ten pieces of selected articles on the PD and CD from the Chinese side, reflecting the predominant focus of this research is on Chinese media's discourse.

Table 4-2, displayed below and on the next page, lists the selected SCMP articles for analysis. By including these articles, this thesis offers a holistic overview. Also, it aids in examining the nuances and subtleties that underpin the multifaceted media landscape in terms of the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

Source	Type	Topic	Argumentations/Discursive themes (see bracket)	Date
SCMP	Article	Chinese diplomats warn Beijing 'won't sit on its hands' if Hong Kong spirals out of control	Justification for repression (Rule and Law)	15th August 2019
SCMP	Article	Protesters are told not to be pawns of foreign powers	Marginalised the protestors (Rule and Law)	16th June 2019
SCMP	Article	Hong Kong being dragged down 'path of no return' says Carrie Lam, as she calls protests an attack on Beijing's sovereignty	Stress the large scale and impact of the protests (Nationalism and Rule and Law)	5th August 2019
SCMP	Article	Unprecedented violence in Hong Kong as protesters storm legislature, police fire tear gas	Focus on violence by protestors (Rule and Law)	1st July 2019
SCMP	Article	China summons US envoy in protest over Hong Kong extradition bill remarks	Blame the Western interference (Nationalism)	14th June 2019

Table 4-2 Hong Kong media data from the South China Morning Post (SCMP)

4.5 CDA Analysis: The Hong Kong Side

In this segment, I turned my attention to an in-depth examination of the media discourses emanating from Hong Kong's perspective. Grounded on the five arguments delineated in section 4.2, this section seeks to shed light on the Other's representation - in this context, Hong Kong's portrayal of the 2019 protests. It is paramount to emphasise that while China's Self-representation is this research's primary aim, gaining insights into the contrasting narratives from Hong Kong is crucial for a holistic understanding. Such an approach enables the researcher to juxtapose the varied media discourses through which the protests were perceived but also aids in discerning the intricate subtleties and nuances characterising each discourse.

As Hong Kong operates under a distinct sociopolitical and media landscape compared to mainland China, its representation of the protests undoubtedly offers alternative

viewpoints, divergent nuances, and potentially contrasting priorities. By situating the Hong Kong media discourse within the framework of the five arguments mentioned in 4.2, the analysis underscores the multifaceted nature of the protests, ensuring that the analysis remains comprehensive, balanced and grounded in the intricate realities of the 2019 Hong Kong demonstrations.

4.5.1 Justification of Repression

On 15th August 2019, the SCMP published an article named "Chinese diplomats warn Beijing 'won't sit on its hands' if Hong Kong spirals out of control" with subheading, mentioned "Ambassadors to Britain and Germany say central government will be forced to act if crisis deepens and point to Basic Law's provisions for military intervention", indicated the CCP's intention to suppress the protests if the crisis deepens. The article wrote:

> (11). Two of China's *leading* diplomats in Europe have warned that Beijing will not *stand idly* by if the chaos in Hong Kong worsens…Speaking at a press conference in London on Thursday, [Ambassador to Britain] Liu Xiaoming said that the central government *would have to act* if the situation became "uncontrollable" and "*would not sit on its hands and watch*"…We have *enough solutions* and *enough power* within the limit of the Basic Law to *quell* any unrest swiftly," Liu said…"We hope this will end in an orderly way. In the meantime we are *fully prepared* for the worst," Liu said, adding that "*extremists masquerading as democracy protesters* are dragging Hong Kong down a dangerous road" …Meanwhile, [Ambassador to Germany] Wu Ken made similar remarks on Wednesday in an interview with Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen ("Second German Television", ZDF) television, said: "The current situation first and foremost is the responsibility of the [Hong Kong] SAR government," Wu said. "But if the SAR government fails to control the situation, the central government would, of course, *provide assistance*" (SCMP, 15th August 2019; my emphasis).

Compared to the PD and the CD, mainly as the CCP's mouthpiece instead of reporting the truth, the SCMP has some degrees of media freedom (see 3.5 for a detailed introduction of the SCMP's background). However, this article from the SCMP hinted at its media stance, which is similar to the PD and the CD in terms of the protests. Firstly, the heading and subheading of the article mentioned 'Chinese diplomats',

‘Ambassador to Britain and Germany’, and ‘central government’. The former two nominations (e.g., diplomats, ambassadors) indicated their position is high, which means they have more power than ordinary people. Thus, their words to the media have authority and represent the CCP’s attitude. Meanwhile, metonym within the article provide layers of meaning, such as the term ‘central government’ stands out as a metonym for the CCP, suggesting its encompassing authority.

Secondly, the article itself uses the terms such as ‘not stand idly’, ‘have to act’, and ‘would not sit on its hands and watch’, constructs an image of the CCP’s assertive and proactive on the one hand, but also implies the CCP’s worrying about the situation and its intention of repression if the protests continue to develop or become uncontrollable. At the same time, describing protestors as ‘extremists masquerading as democracy protesters’ offers a significant interpretative frame. It not only questions the legitimacy of the protests but simultaneously positions the protests as potential threats. This sentiment is reinforced by Ambassador Wu’s statement, which he subtly transfers the responsibility of managing the situation onto the Hong Kong SAR government, while keeping the central government’s involvement as a potential but looming possibility in the near future.

Finally, both Liu’s comment (i.e., enough solutions, enough power, fully prepared, etc.) and Wu’s remarks (i.e., provide assistance) regarding the protests fully corresponded to the subheading of the article (i.e., military intervention), which illustrated the CCP’s strongly unsatisfied to the HKSAR government’s measures in dealing with the protests. To sum up, these words from the high-level CCP officials showed a clear sign of warning to the protestors that the CCP could and would take severe actions toward the protests, hence justifying the CCP’s next step of repression and action (i.e., swiftly passing the NSL in 2020).

4.5.2 Marginalising the Protestors

The SCMP published an article on 16th June 2019, aimed to marginalise the protestors by warning them “not to become pawns”. The article titled “Protesters are told not to be pawns of foreign powers”, wrote:

> (12). Beijing’s liaison office in Hong Kong has called on protestors not to be used as *pawns* by foreign forces amid the US-China trade war…Some Hong Kong people and organisations have been used as *pawns*, especially in the US-China

> trade war…Veteran businessman and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) delegate Chan Wing-Kee said he was also concerned some protesters were *being used*. "What I fear most is that some people want to incite clashes between police and the people," he said (SCMP, 16th June 2019; my emphasis).

The above article points out a necessary background: the US-China trade war erupted between 2018 and 2019 due to the economic conflict (e.g., unfair trade practices /intellectual property theft) between the two most important countries in the world. This trade war has exacerbated the relations between China and the US. Thus, the CCP took the opportunity to propagate nationalism in China, which aims to deal with this external risk and construct a unified Chinese national identity.

Against this backdrop, the immediate linguistic cue that stands out in this article is the portrayal of the Hong Kong protestors as 'pawns'. For example, although the article's title (i.e., not to be pawns of foreign powers) is seemingly a friendly persuasion of the protestors, in fact, it is an indirect warning from the CCP. In the lexicon of CDA, this term (i.e., pawns) is a clear indicator of depersonalisation and diminishment of an agency. By metaphorical protestors to pawns, the narrative subtly strips their autonomy and positions them as mere tools in the hands of more prominent, powerful forces (e.g., the US/the UK), which seek to benefit themselves and achieve their own interests (e.g., split China/interfering in Chinese internal affairs) instead of caring about Hong Kong's real issue. On the other hand, being a 'pawn' implies that foreign countries could discard these protestors at any time. This metaphorical representation not only delegitimises the actual grievances of the protestors and marginalises their identities but also transfers the focus from local issues to a broader geopolitical stage, specifically under the background of the US-China trade war. By representing the unrest as externally orchestrated, this article mitigates the CCP's bad things, for example, squeezing Hong Kong's autonomy and generally eroding its political system, directly or indirectly interfering with Hong Kong's democracy and freedom. Concurrently, legitimates the CCP's following-step repression of the protests in the name of territory and sovereignty integrity.

4.5.3 Impact of the Protests

On 5th August 2019, SCMP published an article titled: "*Hong Kong being dragged down 'path of no return' says Carrie Lam, as she calls protests an attack on Beijing's sovereignty*", which indicates the impact of the protests. The article mentioned:

> (13). Hong Kong's *embattled* leader Carrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor has warned anti-government protesters they are dragging the city down a "*path of no return*", and called the ongoing civil unrest an *attack on Beijing's sovereignty*, on "one country, two systems", and an attempt to *destroy* Hong Kong…The chief executive was speaking after at least 73 protesters were arrested amid intense clashes with riot police in Mong Kok, Tsim Sha Tsui and Causeway Bay over the weekend, as demonstrators also *wreaked havoc* in at least seven other locations across the city in flash-mob demonstrations (SCMP, 5th August 2019; my emphasis).

This article was collected from SCMP, but the original source comes from Carrie Lam's (Hong Kong's then Chief Executive, hereafter CE) press conference. The conference indicates Lam's formal response to the protests and is her first public appearance in two weeks at that time. At the beginning, Lam was described by SCMP as an *embattled* leader, highlighting her dilemma in dealing with the unprecedented protests in Hong Kong's history. Certainly, as an indigenous politician, she understands that the protests are significant and essential components of Hong Kong politics (for more details, please see 1.2), and this time is no exception. However, based on the '*One Country, Two Systems*' (hereafter OCTS) policy and being as the CE at that time, Lam must obey the (Chinese) central government/the CCP's direct order to maintain Hong Kong's social harmony and stability, which indicates that she had to end the turmoil at any cost, even by taking repressive actions.

In the article mentioned above, Lam uses the term *path of no return* as an ideological framework to seemingly persuade but actually warn the protesters to cease their aggressive actions, implying that she worried the protests may have enraged China/the CCP and hence damaged the interests of all 7 million Hong Kong people. The term *path of no return* also amplifies the sense of impending danger and irreversible consequences the protests caused, reflecting Lam's isolated and worrying situation at that time. Interestingly, by applying different discursive strategies, this article implicitly entails SCMP's stance on the protests. That is, it (i.e., SCMP) condemns the adverse consequences that the protests brought to Hong Kong society, but the newspaper neither supports the Hong Kong government's suppressive actions towards the

protesters nor encourages the demonstrators' violent struggle towards the state apparatus. This attitude is similar to the outlet's reports on previous social movements, e.g., the 2014 Umbrella Movement (for more details, please see 3.6.2).

Furthermore, Lam's intimidating response in the article also suggests the CCP's apprehension about the situation at the time, reflecting its negative stance towards the protests. By exaggerating the severe consequences of protests, the CCP aims to instil the 'chilling effect', rekindling fear and anxiety among protestors to silence dissent and halt their activities. Kou et al. (2017) note that the CCP has a history of using such tactics in Hong Kong, e.g., during the 2014 Umbrella Movement. In addition, Lam mentioned the protests 'attack on Beijing's sovereignty', in which she used the term *Beijing* as a metonymy of China/the CCP, as it is the capital and political centre in China. By saying this, Lam implies that the protests have threatened China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, hence indicating that the CCP may take severe suppressive actions towards the protestors in the following step.

On the other hand, by using intensified phrases, e.g., destroy and wreaked havoc, Lam pointed out that the protests had caused vast devastation and unavoidable consequences for Hong Kong. These words from the then CE clearly emphasised the severe situation at that time. However, by deliberately distorting and manipulating Lam's words on the Chinese state and social media, the CCP could propagate the false purpose of the protests, i.e., the protests aim to split Hong Kong from China to its domestic audience, hence instigating so-called patriotism, essentially nationalism to fortify Chinese national identity construction and the CCP's political legitimacy.

Besides the aforementioned, Lam also mentions the following words in the same article:

> (14). Hong Kong has been the safest city in the world, but this series of extremely violent acts is pushing Hong Kong to a very dangerous situation, some extreme activists have *altered the nature* of these [protests], resorting to violent means to express their aspirations…"These actions *challenge* national sovereignty, *threaten* one country, two systems, and will *destroy* the city's prosperity and stability," she said. (SCMP, 5th August 2019; my emphasis).

It is noteworthy that Lam referred to the term *altered the nature*. By applying mitigation strategies, Lam subtly overlooks the nature of the protests, i.e., the protests seek political reform in Hong Kong and try to preserve Hong Kong's democracy and freedom.

Instead, she only indicates that some extreme activists have changed the nature of the protests without explicating why the protests happened and sustained for such a long time. To some extent, the protests indeed brought turmoil in Hong Kong society. However, most demonstrators refrained from resorting to violence. In addition, those negative words, such as *challenge*, *threaten* and *destroy*, utilised by Lam also indicate her 'presupposed' point of view towards the protests, i.e., hostile and negative. Against this backdrop, she deliberately neglected the protestors' five demands, i.e., Full withdrawal of the bill; Inquiry the police brutality; Retracting the protesters as rioters; Amnesty for arrested protesters; and Dual universal suffrage for both the LegCo and the CE.

To sum up, by emphasising the protestors' bad things, i.e., they were trying to challenge national sovereignty and threaten the OCTS policy, Lam's words at the press conference explicitly represent a delegitimised Other, hence justifying the government taking more actions towards the protests to legitimise Self.

4.5.4 Focus on Protestors' Violence

The SCMP published an article on 1st July 2019, which marked the 22nd anniversary of Hong Kong's handover to China, titled "A Day of unprecedented violence in Hong Kong as protesters storm the Legislative Council and police fire[d] tear gas", which recorded protestors' real-time actions on that day from 1:44 pm to 1:13 am on the next day, focused on protestors' violence and provided live updates on the police and ordinary people's response to the protests. The article wrote at the beginning as follows:

> (15). Police fired several rounds of tear gas to disperse radical protesters who *stormed* into Hong Kong's Legislative Council as a day of *unprecedented* violence and chaos marked the 22nd anniversary of the city's return to China. A squad armed in riot gear and wielding shields appeared at Harcourt Road where protesters were milling about at around 11.40 pm. They began positioning themselves and removing barriers on the road. Earlier, protesters had *stormed* into the Legislative Council and *defaced* the chamber, after hours of *besieging* the building, *smashing* glass doors and *dismantling* metal bars. Their actions were in stark contrast to a peaceful rally where 550,000 marchers according [to] organisers took part in the annual July 1 march (SCMP, 1st July 2019; my emphasis).

It is worth noting that before the CCP implemented Hong Kong National Security Law in 2020, Hong Kong people had the tradition of marching annually on 1st July every year, which marked Hong Kong's handover to China, to remember those people who lost their lives during the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989 and pray for the early realisation of democracy and freedom in China. Specifically in this article, on the one hand, the word *unprecedented* in the title and the second line, pointed out the intensity of the violence that erupted on 1st July 2019 was large-scale and never happened before. The word *storm* in the title and first line of the article, on the other hand, indicates a significant number of protestors attacked and entered the building (i.e., LegCo) suddenly. Through using intensification strategy (i.e., strategic use of language to amplify or emphasise certain aspects of a discourse, often to promote a particular viewpoint or persuade the audience), these terms effectively increased the possibility of the protests that may deal significant and unexpected damage and also bring instability to the whole society of Hong Kong.

In addition, by using other negative terms, such as *deface*, *besiege*, *smash* and *dismantle*, this article vividly illustrates how violent actions the protesters did in the LegCo, the legislature of Hong Kong and the power centre of the SAR government. These actions suggest the protestors' contempt and arrogance toward law and order, the redline emphasised by the Chinese central government/the CCP that no one can cross. In the end, the article mentions: 'their actions were in stark contrast to a peaceful rally'. The term *in stark contrast*, juxtaposed the actions of the protestors to an annually peaceful march on 1st July, which strongly implied these actions were unpeaceful, violent and extreme. Hence, these protestors may incur the CCP's retaliation and bloody repression in the next step.

4.5.5 Western Interference and the Blame Game

On 14th June 2019, the SCMP published an article titled 'China summons US envoy in protest over Washington's condemnation of Hong Kong extradition bill', indicates that the Chinese side/the CCP blames the Western interference of the protests. The article wrote:

> (16). [The then Vice Foreign Minister] Le [Yucheng] said China did not accept foreign forces *meddling* in Hong Kong affairs. "China called on the United States ... to *immediately stop* all interference in Hong Kong's affairs and stop taking action that would affect the prosperity and stability of Hong Kong" … "China will proceed

with its next step based on the action taken by the US" (SCMP, 14th June 2019; my emphasis).

and

(17) "The United States is one of Hong Kong's major trading partners. It is in the interest of the United States that Hong Kong can continue to be prosperous and stable. It is not good for the United States to *mess up* Hong Kong," … "I would like to emphasise China's *determination and will* to uphold its *unshakeable sovereign and development interests*. We are not afraid of any *threats or intimidation*" … "Any attempt to create chaos in Hong Kong and undermine Hong Kong's prosperity and stability will be confronted by *all Chinese people*, including the *vast number of Hong Kong compatriots*" [The then Chinese foreign ministry spokesman] Geng [Shuang] said (SCMP, 14th June 2019; my emphasis).

Note, in the article above, there are two Chinese foreign ministry officials commented and condemned the Western forces (i.e., the US) interfered in Chinese internal affairs (i.e., the 2019 Hong Kong protests), which implied the CCP's high focus and worried the situation of Hong Kong might affect its social stability and even challenged the CCP's authority to rule in the region. The former comment from the then Vice Foreign Minister, Le Yucheng, focused on seriously warning the US not to interfere in Hong Kong affairs and emphasised China's unending resolve to sort out this issue of the Hong Kong protests. By intensifying *their* bad things (i.e., the US interfered in Hong Kong affairs), Le's comment suggested that the CCP tried to transfer the public's eyes by propagating the Western intention of interfering in Chinese internal affairs, thus inciting nationalism in China to mitigate *our* bad things (i.e., direct or indirect interfering in Hong Kong's freedom and political autonomy) and legitimates the CCP's repression of the protests in the name of sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Compared to Le's strong condemnation and warning (i.e., immediately stop all interference) of the US's interference in Hong Kong's affairs, the latter comment from the then Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Geng Shuang seems 'soft' at the beginning. On the one hand, by connecting the US's national interest (i.e., its trade relations) with Hong Kong, Geng's comment with a kind of 'persuasion' to the US focused more on interests than the protests *per se* and not messed up in the Hong Kong affairs, might be seen indirectly as the CCP's intention to downplay the seriousness of the protests and their severe outcomes which might affect the relations

between China and the US. On the other hand, Geng's words in the next were in stark contrast to the beginning by juxtaposing the possible serious outcomes if the US continues to interfere in Hong Kong with the US as one of the major trading partners of Hong Kong, his comment using intensified terms such as *determination and will*, *unshakeable sovereign and development interests*, etc., which corresponded to what Le's comment in the former, and indicated that the CCP's strong attitude of blaming the Western interference in Chinese internal affairs. In the end of this article, Geng mentioned the terms *all Chinese people* and *vast number of Hong Kong compatriots*, which he nominates these two groups in replacing the CCP/the SAR government, indirectly mitigated our bad things and hide the CCP's malicious intention of bloody repression of the protests, hence legitimates their next step's actions.

4.6 Findings and Discussion

As aforementioned (see 2.3), the information gained from the state-owned media is still important for ordinary Chinese people. From the Chinese side, the data collected from two state media (i.e., the PD and the CD) proved this thesis. These media discourses indicated how subtle but complex the CCP manipulated Chinese state media during the protests to legitimise Self and delegitimise Others. In general, the PD and the CD's narrative of the protests focused on two discursive themes, namely nationalism and rule and law. Based on the two themes, I found five arguments (see 4.2) which corresponded to these themes. By applying different discursive strategies in CDA, the PD and the CD's discourses intensified the salient meaning of particular and taken for granted terms and phrases (e.g., sovereignty, national security, One Country, Two Systems, etc.), which could beneficial to the Self side representation of the protests and advantageous to the CCP's legitimacy on the one hand, and mitigated those words and meanings which may be beneficial to the Other side representation of the protests, but harmful to the CCP's image and reputation (i.e., the CCP's intention to harshly crackdown of the protests) and threaten its authority to rule in Hong Kong on the other hand. By keeping high consistent views of the CCP, the PD and the CD served as the state-owned media and the mouthpiece of the CCP, increasing their authenticity and credibility in the Chinese public, which also made their propaganda and narrative of the protests more influential among the Chinese people and subtly constructed Chinese national identity.

From the Hong Kong side, compared to the Chinese state media (i.e., the PD and the CD) who explicitly expressed their attitudes of severely punishing protestors and terminate the protests as early as possible, although the SCMP expressed criticism of the protests (i.e., the SCMP mentioned the protests attack on Beijing's sovereignty) and indicated the CCP implemented an effective leadership in the region on the one hand, it also emphasised Hong Kongers' widespread opposition of passing the extradition bill on the other hand (Cao et al., 2022). However, both the PD and the CD from China and the SCMP from Hong Kong admitted that the protests marked the most serious crisis since Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997. What their nuanced reporting style in terms of the protests, might be explained by their different media systems (ibid). On the one hand, both the PD and the CD are the state-owned media in China, which is the mouthpiece and highly controlled by the CCP. Whereas the SCMP, on the other hand, as a non-governmental newspaper but with a high global reputation in Hong Kong since 1903, enjoys a high degree of freedom of the press under the unique political framework of the OCTS. Thus, the SCMP's reporting of the protests seems to be less politicised and subjective, but in more neutral ways and takes objective viewpoints based on facts (for more details, please see 3.5.2).

However, this does not mean the SCMP has no journalism stance on the protests. As Pounds (2010: 107) states, "All journalism is ultimately opinion journalism in that it is always possible to detect signs of authorial stance even in 'hard-news reporting'". Pound's claim underscores the intricate relationship between media representation and the underlying ideologies that permeate even the most seemingly objective of news reports. This perspective is especially obvious in this thesis. Amid the backdrop of the 2019 Hong Kong protests, media reports, whether from China or Hong Kong as shown in this chapter, inevitably contain stance from authors. Such stances are not merely reflective of individual biases but sometimes resonate with broader socio-political, cultural, and historical narratives. Through the lens of Pounds' viewpoint, it becomes evident that discourses, particularly in relation to identity and legitimacy, are never neutrally articulated. Instead, they are constructed, negotiated and presented within particular frameworks that aim to affirm certain ideologies while challenging or marginalising others.

Given the title of this thesis, the dichotomy of Self and Other is a binary opposition that has deep roots in discursive practices. Media narratives consciously or not, position the protests and protestors (i.e., the Other) in relation to the perceived Self (i.e., the

Chinese government/the CCP). The manner in which these narratives are constructed, the choice of words, the framing of events, and the emphasis on certain aspects over others all hint at an underlying stance, echoing Pounds' claim. Furthermore, the context of China brings another layer of complexity. As identity and legitimacy are central themes of this thesis, the media's portrayal of the protests becomes the battleground for validating or contesting notions of Chinese nationalism and territorial integrity. Hence, news reports are far from being mere factual accounts; instead, they are transformed into sites of ideological contestation, where discourses are shaped to resonate with particular versions of identity and legitimacy.

In addition, Martin and White (2005: 183) illustrated that the "reporter voice" typical of news reports was found to be particularly frequent in the coverage of accidents, misadventures and crimes. Specifically, the SCMP during the violent protests, focused much more about Hong Kong's future instead of other higher political factors (e.g., national security). On the other hand, the SCMP's evolving identity in the process of reorganisation and the larger context of Hong Kong's socio-political contexts since its handover to China in 1997 made the local newspaper had to keep the same pace with the SAR government and the Chinese central government, especially concerning China's baseline of "One Country" policy (Cao, Zhang and Luo, 2022: 75).

During the analysis, I found some texts and phrases (e.g., the rule of law/national sovereignty, etc.) frequently used in the PD and the CD's articles. The phrase 'rule of law', which is set by the CCP as a redline of governing Hong Kong, was constantly repeated by the Chinese state media during the protests. It is suggested that when the CCP met a crisis which may challenge its legitimacy or authority to rule, it always emphasised some vague concepts such as rule and law, but the CCP itself would never obey this. For instance, the CCP implemented the Hong Kong NSL in 2020, abolishing Hong Kong's high autonomy, which the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration promised. However, the CCP claimed that the Sino-British Joint Declaration, as a historical document, does not have any practical significance. Thus, the phrase (i.e., rule of law) is just a rhetoric for the Chinese state media to frame the protests to the Chinese people that the Self (i.e., the CCP) is legitimate and the Other (i.e., the protestors) is delegitimate. Nevertheless, this phrase indirectly indicated that the protests challenged the CCP's governing principle in Hong Kong and threatened its ruling authority and legitimacy.

Another repeated phrase is ‘national sovereignty’, in which the PD and the CD mentioned several times that the violent activities undermined national sovereignty and condemned those foreign countries (e.g., the US/the UK) interference in Hong Kong’s affairs would damage China’s national sovereignty. According to Wodak et al. (1999), the concept of a nation is not an intrinsic and natural entity but constructed by discourses and has different symbolic orientations. As a community, the nation relies not only on the division of objective factors like religion, ethnicity and geography. Instead, the nation is socially constructed and imagined by those who perceive themselves as belonging to the group (Anderson, 1991). Thus, nationalism as one of the core concepts of the nation, is full of uncertainties but also possibilities according to Anderson’s definition of the nation (see 2.2.3). This means that the nation’s division largely depends on the operation of the practice and the discourse level. According to the articles in the PD and the CD, it is clear that the Chinese state media portrays the Western countries as “the black hand” who supports the protests. Thus, the protests are not an internal Chinese conflict but have turned into a confrontation between the “Chinese nation” and the “Western nations”. This kind of discourse reconstructs the connotation of nationalism, making the Chinese people recognise Chinese national identity due to the protests.

As aforementioned (see 1.6), due to China’s past humiliation history, any issue which would threaten China’s national sovereignty is taboo for the Chinese people. As the central locus of communication of the CCP, the Chinese state media played a significant role in propagating that only the CCP could help China to brush the century of humiliation caused by foreign powers (Dittmer and Kim, 1993; Zheng and Zheng, 1999; Zhao, 2004; Tang and Darr, 2012). On the other hand, the state-owned media always incite nationalistic sentiment to transfer the public’s focus and relieve the CCP’s internal or external pressure and reinforce the CCP’s stability and credibility when it met crisis from the outside (i.e., the 2019 Hong Kong protests). As previously stated, (see 2.2.7), after the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, nationalism has become an important pillar of the CCP’s legitimacy and also underpinning the CCP’s continued authoritarian rule (Zhao, 1998). It is argued that Chinese nationalism consists of two facets. The first side is based on the Chinese people’s pride in their national identity and achievements. Another side comes from Chinese people’s strong sentiment of anti-foreign interference and their sense of victimisation (Gries et al., 2011; Woods and Dickson, 2017).

According to Tang and Darr (2012), the latter side of Chinese nationalism implies why many Chinese people do not support China implementing Western-style democracy. In recent years, the Chinese state media's propaganda tries to promote and preserve the precious Chinese traditions to media discourse, to enhance national self-esteem and self-confidence on the one hand and opposed to Western ideologies on the other hand (Perry, 2017). Under Xi Jinping's leadership since 2012, Chinese citizens tended to be more hawkish than dovish (Weiss, 2019), suggesting a noticeable shift among the Chinese populace towards supporting a more assertive or aggressive stance in foreign affairs. This can be manifested in various ways, such as supporting strong responses to territorial disputes, backing military buildups, and favouring confrontational rhetoric when dealing with perceived challenges to national sovereignty or pride. In the meantime, as an influential country in the world, China has particularly become more radical and proactive in enlarging its global influence by trying to seize the dominant position of discourse power, to emphasise the advantages of the CCP's governance system (Pei, 2018) on the one hand, and tries to influence how the world perceives Western-backed efforts to promote liberal democracy (Ma and Weiss, 2023: 113) on the other hand.

Against the backdrop, during the 2019 Hong Kong protests, the CCP embedded the so-called prevailing narratives and ideologies within Chinese state media discourses, propagated to the Chinese people that the protests, as a conspiracy initiated by a small group of individuals, were unlawful and would threaten Hong Kong's prosperity, stability and national security and would never succeed. At the same time, the CCP also strongly condemned the foreign countries as 'black hands', surreptitiously manipulating the protests and brutally interfering in Hong Kong's affairs and/or Chinese internal affairs. As Nathan (2003) claims, the most common and effective approach for the CCP to de-legitimise and prevent such social movement (i.e., the 2019 Hong Kong protests) contagion to mainland China, is to blame Western interference in Chinese internal affairs or 'black hands' from foreign countries (i.e., the US/the UK) and exaggerate the severe outcomes, such as the protests would lead to social unrest, prevented countries or region's economic growth, and threatened stability and prosperity of the whole society. According to Soest and Grauvogel (2017: 287), these outcomes would illustrate that a regime (i.e., the CCP) as a 'guarantor of stability, territorial integrity or state building', hence justify its rule and become a part of its claim to legitimacy (Ma and Weiss, 2023).

In addition, it is claimed that by emphasising the scale and the intensity of the protests, the CCP may promote a 'rally effect' among its supporters, who express some worries about glorifying Western democracy (Ma and Weiss, 2023: 112). Due to such propaganda and ideological reshaping, a great number of Chinese people may not understand the 'real face' of the protests and focus less on the facts *per se*. Instead, they tended to support the CCP's action to terminate and crack down on the protests to safeguard national security and sovereign integrity and take the same stance with the official. Given this, the CCP effectively legitimates the Self's action (i.e., repression) and de-legitimates the Other's action (i.e., protests).

To sum up, although the CCP exercises de facto administrative control in Hong Kong, Chinese state media's clichés indirectly indicated that the CCP's influence in Hong Kong was diminishing. For example, even under the CCP's direct rule, the SAR government could not impose the extradition bill because of the protests. In the meantime, Hong Kongers' bravery, heroism and undaunting resistance in the protests made the CCP realise that their effort to construct a unified Chinese national identity failed. The conflicts between Hong Kongers' identity and Chinese national identity, illustrated that the CCP met authority crisis in Hong Kong due to the protests. For instance, during the protests, some protestors carried posters written 'This is Hong Kong, not China', and according to a poll from the University of Hong Kong in 2019, nearly 75 per cent of people in Hong Kong, aged between 18 to 29 identified themselves as 'Hong Konger' instead of 'Chinese'. This result corresponds to Flowerdew's (2012) claim that Hong Kong people preferred to call themselves 'Hong Kong people' or 'Hong Kong Chinese' instead of 'Chinese' when asked (see 2.4.2). To some extent, the protests initiated by against the proposed extradition bill, have generally morphed into Hong Kongers' actions to express their demands and grievances and are far beyond the protests ***per se***. The protests indicated the Hong Kongers' willingness to preserve their salient identity, which challenged the CCP's Chinese national identity construction. The Hong Kongers' identity is unique, not just because it simply challenges the Chinese national identity. Moreover, it is a high resilience spirit with collective consciousness, which throughout pursued freedom, democracy and resisted the oppression from the authoritarian regime (i.e., the CCP).

Taken in this context, although the CCP has tried subtle approaches such as state media propaganda to construct a seemingly unified national identity to deceive the Chinese people in hopes of shaping and creating a positive image of the Self and

portraying a negative image of the Other, the government's efforts have yet to succeed. According to Erickson (1968), an identity crisis begins with losing a given status. It also happens when a given event causes a reshuffling of social hierarchy, where some social classes may lose out. This theory partly explains the identity conflicts between Hong Kong and China in terms of the 2019 Hong Kong protests. When the pro-Beijing legislators introduced the extradition bill, many Hong Kongers saw this action as a direct threat to their freedom and the high autonomy of the region, and their distinctive identity was in danger. Hence, it led to the most severe protests in Hong Kong since its handover to China in 1997. According to previous states, the representation by the Chinese state media to demonise and de-legitimise the Other (i.e., the protests/the protestors) has brought further divisions between the Hong Kongers and Chinese people (see 1.1). It is argued that the identity given to the de-legitimised Other is based on the unequal power relations between the two sides (i.e., the CCP and the protestors), as the strong side (i.e., the CCP) has mustered the correct classification, destination, and operation of the symbol, making it possible to define the nature of the Other. However, by doing this, the CCP's intention to construct a seemingly unified Chinese national identity becomes more complex, and the CCP's authority to rule in Hong Kong is in doubt and diminishing after the protests.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I analysed top-down media discourses (i.e., articles and editorials) both in Chinese state media and Hong Kong media to illustrate how Self and Other's representation of the 2019 Hong Kong protests. The nature of the protests emphasise conflicts between Hong Kongers' and Chinese national identities caused by unequal power relations between China and Hong Kong. Taken in this context, the protests significantly challenged the CCP's authority to rule in Hong Kong. During the analysis, I primarily focused on analysing vocabularies and phrases by applying different discursive strategies from the CDA, trying to break away from the dogmatic and propagandistic discourses from the Chinese state media and hence, elaborate the CCP's hidden ideologies behind these discourses. I concluded that although the protests exposed the Chinese national identity crisis and significantly challenged the CCP's legitimacy, the CCP, by applying different discursive argumentations (see 3.4.1) and discursive strategies such as referential/nomination, presupposition, intensification and mitigation, effectively manipulated and distorted Chinese state-owned media's narrative of the protests and transferred the public's attention to the

foreign forces' interference of Chinese internal affairs, hence to amplify the Chinese national identity construction and the political legitimacy of the CCP and represent Self as legitimate and Other as delegitimate.

In addition, it is observed that when social movements erupt, Western supporters of democracy tend to assist the local leaders (i.e., Hong Kong) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) who have illustrated interests or promises to democratic values (Finkel, Pérez-Liñán and Seligson, 2007; Levitsky and Way, 2010; Hyde, 2011; Lankina, Libman and Obydenkova, 2016) with fundings and strategies. Although these practices sometimes result in positive and short-term outcomes, they also enable the authoritarian regime such as the CCP to portray Western support are not purely assisting and benefit to the social movements *per se*. Instead, as outside instigators, their true aim is to promote separatism in the name of democratisation (Carnegie and Marinov, 2017; Lyall, Zhou and Imai, 2020; Bush and Prather, 2020). Against this backdrop, the CCP incorporated ideologies in Chinese state-owned media discourses and incited nationalist emotions, hence, effectively prevent the Chinese general public developing shared grievances with the activists (Ma and Weiss, 2023). With nationalist sentiments surpassed other viewpoints, Chinese people may pay less attention on democratic and freedom issues and focus more on protecting China's national sovereignty and territorial integrity (Anderson, 1991).

Conducive to maintaining balance, I also compared and contrasted media discourses from the SCMP, a renowned and globally influential Hong Kong newspaper, with Chinese state-owned media's narrative of the same protests. In general, although the SCMP also criticised the social movement and admitted the protests represented the most severe crisis since Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997, its reporting style tended to be implicit and refrained, and focused more on Hong Kong's future after the protests than other sensitive issues, such as national security. After analysis, I concluded that although the CCP's Self-representation of the protests is legitimate and gained an extent of support from the Chinese public, the protests significantly challenged the CCP's legitimacy to rule in Hong Kong and brought more divisions between Hong Kong and China.

Finally, as previous chapters state, the Chinese state media's first priority is to serve the Party (see 2.3.1). Under the CCP's strictest control, the result of Chinese state-owned media's representation of the 2019 Hong Kong protests is highly predictable.

However, with technological advancement and the internet has generally become a significant venue for information dissemination, thus, social media platforms are swiftly replacing traditional/state-owned media and becoming much more prevalent in providing new spaces of citizenry power and collective identity construction (KhosraviNik and Zia, 2014; also see 3.4.8). Against this backdrop, it is noteworthy to continue focusing on and examining representations of the protests in depth, both from Chinese social media platforms (i.e., Weibo and WeChat) in Chapter 5, and Western social media platforms (i.e., Facebook and Twitter) in Chapter 6, as bottom-up media discourses compared to the top-down media discourses.

Chapter 5. Chinese Social Media Discourse: Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter primarily concentrates on the bottom-up linguistic practices of the content that ordinary users generate across social media platforms in China. Social media has become a venue for public discourse among the general public on various public issues, such as natural disaster response (Vieweg et al., 2010), local community development (Crivellaro et al., 2014) and political events (Hamdy and Gomaa, 2012; Starbird and Palen, 2012). Habermas (1991) suggests that public discourse is an important asset of deliberative democracy, while political scientists such as Dahlberg (2001, 2006) and Dahlgren (2002) claim that online venues (i.e., social media), as emerging forms of public sphere, played a significant role in the formation of public opinion. Against this backdrop, two famous Chinese social media platforms, namely Weibo and WeChat are examined, which attracted enormous public opinion and input concerning the 2019 Hong Kong protests from the Chinese side. Consequently, this thesis assumes that the social media user-generated data incorporate input from ordinary citizens in China and other parts of the world instead of discourse by institutional (e.g. state own mass media) or political actors. Through analysis of social media discourse, this chapter elaborates that the protests directly or indirectly unravel the Chinese national identity and the CCP's legitimacy. The obtained data will undergo a detailed textual/visual analysis to account for the linguistic attributes of texts and reflect on the dominant ideologies, representations, and power relations. Following that, the researcher will apply CDA and social theories to provide an interpretation on how linguistic characteristics of the texts will be contextualised and informed.

5.2 Discursive Themes of Weibo and WeChat

By examining one of the pivotal Chinese social media platforms, Weibo, the researcher yielded three distinct discursive themes. These are (1). Positive messaging, encapsulated by sentiments supporting the Hong Kong police and decrying the protests; (2). Negative messaging, which primarily targets the Hong Kong youth and protesters; and (3). Negative messaging, which revolves around assertions of foreign influence in the protests. Furthermore, it is pertinent to mention the invaluable contribution of Qian's (2020) study to this research. As aforementioned in section 3.5.2,

this thesis incorporates insights from Qian's study titled "A Content Analysis of Chinese Weibo Posts About 2019-20 Hong Kong Demonstrations". Qian's empirical approach, characterised by his first-hand data collection on Weibo vis-à-vis the Hong Kong protests, resonates with the objectives of the present research. His analysis enriches the contextual understanding of this thesis and provides a robust framework for interpreting social media discourses in the milieu of the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

Simultaneously, by reading and skimming all the 1304 original articles (see 3.5.3) from another pivotal Chinese social media, WeChat, the researcher identified two salient themes, namely: (1) Nationalism and territorial integrity; and (2) Order and Law. To delve deeper into these themes, a meticulous keyword search was executed within these articles. The selection of specific keywords, presented in Table 5-1 below, was grounded in their intrinsic association with the identified themes. Such posited keywords offer a lucid window into the ordinary Chinese netizens' perceptions, thereby indicating their stance towards the protests. Additionally, these themes extracted from WeChat underscore certain narratives' prominence in shaping public opinion and reflect the broader ideological currents within China's digital space. By isolating these specific themes and keywords, this thesis provides a nuanced understanding of the discourse dynamics that influence and are influenced by the broader socio-political background of the Hong Kong protests.

Discursive themes	Keywords
Nationalism and territorial integrity	patriotism, the Chinese people, against China, sovereignty, territory, foreign forces, Western interfere
Order and Law	rule and law, order, social stability, terrorism, damage/threat, violence, prosperity

Table 5-1 Two Discursive Themes and Their Respective Keywords For Analysis

5.3 Data Analysis

Through analysing from the lens of CDA, exploring data collected from two prominent Chinese social media platforms provides a profound understanding of the intricate

nuances of Chinese grassroots discourses vis-à-vis the 2019 Hong Kong protests. While the nature of some content might be influenced by the state media, manifesting in hashtags and images endorsing entities such as the Hong Kong Police, the SAR government, or even the CCP itself (Koetse, 2019), these data are still valid for analysis. It is imperative to note that content on Chinese social media platforms, even if echoing state-endorsed narratives, can still yield significant insights into the socio-political landscapes that shape netizen behaviour. In the context of China, a country marked by its distinctive media ecology and tightly orchestrated information dissemination mechanisms, these endorsements and shared posts reflect not just top-down imposition, but possibly a combination of state propaganda and individual sentiment. Furthermore, such a synthesis of state narratives and netizen posts underscores how state narratives might be internalised, resisted, or reconfigured in public. By analysing these posts, the researcher can unravel the complex layers of public opinion, discerning between purely state-induced rhetoric and what could be a genuine sentiment, even if the latter converges with the state's narrative.

5.3.1 Weibo: An Analysis of Discursive Themes

The discourse surrounding the 2019 Hong Kong protests on major Chinese social media platforms initially demonstrated a conspicuous reticence but rapidly evolved into a focal point of online discussions, even though the overarching discussion remained under stringent governmental surveillance and censorship. Weibo, often compared to Twitter for its microblogging attributes (see 2.3.5), emerged as a place of vigorous discussions regarding the protests. These discussions were not merely confined to official media's Weibo account (e.g., the People's Daily) but also permeated to the ordinary Chinese people. Upon meticulous data analysis, the researcher identified three dominant discursive themes on Weibo concerning the protests, as aforementioned (see 5.2). The first one is positive messaging: protect Hong Kong, support Hong Kong police. This strand of discourse encapsulated the overarching sentiment favouring stability and unity from the Chinese general public. The second one is negative messaging: Hong Kong youth and protestors. Such representations potentially reflected a broader strategy to delegitimise the protestors and their cause. And finally is negative messaging: Claims of Foreign Influence (over Chinese internal affairs), which questioned the protests' motivation authenticity and their indigenous roots. In synthesising these, it becomes evident that while Weibo offers a discussion

platform for different views, there are apparent patterns and thematic trajectories, possibly shaped by genuine sentiment and orchestrated narratives. Below I am starting to analyse these themes.

Theme 1. Positive messaging: Protect Hong Kong, Support Hong Kong police.

The hashtag #ProtectHongKong# (Chinese: #守护香港#) became popular with more than 5 billion views when discussion of the protests began on Weibo. This hashtag, combined with another one, named #OfficersWeSupportYou# (Chinese: #阿 sir 我们挺你#) with 300 million views, was promoted by the state media, The People's Daily (see 3.5.1 for its brief introduction). The word 'officer' is a unique form in Hong Kong when they are calling policemen or teachers. In the meantime, the People's Daily also posted a picture (Figure 5-1, see below), which intensifies images of three police officers (in the centre), China's Five-Starred Red Flag (on the top-left), and the slogan 'Protect Hong Kong' (on the top-right) of the picture. The three police officers, one carrying a gun in the middle, while the other two wearing protective screens and carrying batons and shields are on the left- and right-hand side of the previous police, illustrated a resolute and fearless expression. While behind the three police officers are a significant number of protesters with relegating images, which suggests the People's Daily deliberately mitigated them.

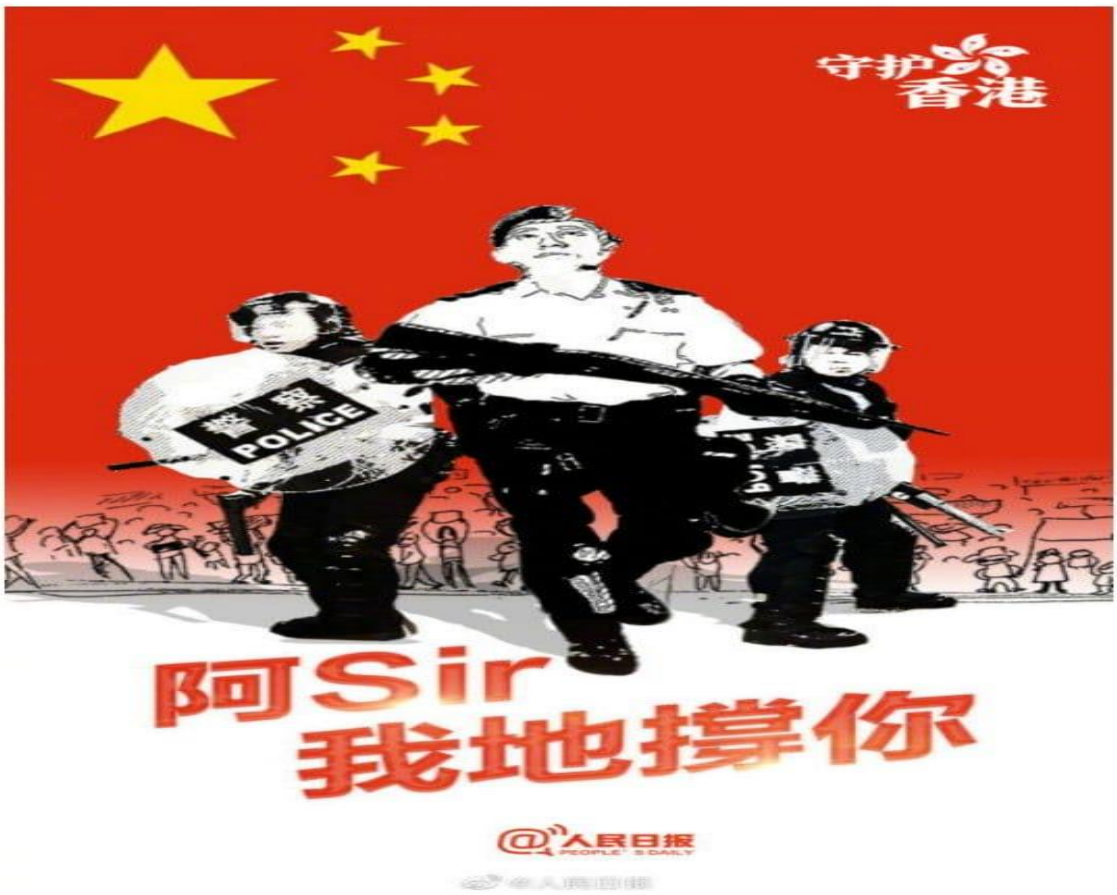

Figure 5-1 An online poster from the People's Daily (Source: The People's Daily Weibo account).

At the same time, the China Daily (see 3.4 for its brief introduction) also issued a poster on Weibo, which has nearly the same slogan with the People's Daily (Figure 5-2, see below).

Figure 5-2 An online poster from the China Daily (Source: The China Daily's Weibo account).

From these hashtags and posters mentioned above, it is suggested that the CCP clearly shows support attitude toward the SAR government and the Hong Kong Police to deal with the protestors, or the so-called "mobs" with violence/brutality from the Chinese side, to restore "law and order". This action was also supported by the Chinese netizens, as their common stance expressed on Weibo was that these pro-democracy protesters are doing things aimed at threatening Hong Kong's security and

stability on the one hand and secession of the nation on the other hand. For example, one commenter wrote on Weibo post:

> (1). I must admit that talking about principles such as *democracy* and *freedom* are *fair and reasonable*, which represent the epitome of human rights and individual agency. However, it is essential to underscore that both *democracy* and *freedom* function best within a system of laws that balances personal freedoms with societal harmony. Even pursuing such ideals, breaking the law first is *unrealistic*, potentially leading to chaos or further restrictions. Genuine, lasting change arises from respecting *legal boundaries* while passionately advocating democratic and freedom values (@Meishenmahaoshuodi, 9th August 2019; my emphasis).

Another person said the following:

> (2). Once celebrated as the '*Pearl of the Orient*', Hong Kong was a shining beacon in East Asia. It blended cultures and traditions, a perfect fusion of East and West. But recent times have cast a shadow over this gleaming metropolis. The streets that once echoed with the harmonious hum of daily life now resonate with cries of dissent and the clamour of unrest due to the violent protests. Each day's news seems to carry fresh tales of confrontations, of a city grappling with its identity and future. The once-illuminated Pearl is now covered with *cuts and bruises* (@Renshiyufen, 9th August 2019; my emphasis).

In the first post, the words *democracy* and *freedom* appeared twice. Although Chinese people do not enjoy 'real' democracy (i.e., general election rights) and freedom of speech (i.e., due to state media control and social media censorship, see 2.3.2 and 2.3.5). However, this post suggested in the Chinese context, democracy and freedom should have a 'boundary', which is not breaking the law and acting outrageously. Clearly, it should (have a boundary) for democracy and freedom. Nevertheless, instead of just withdraw the extradition bill, what the Hong Kongers did in the protests is strive for democracy and freedom *per se*. The second post uses phrases *Pearl of the Orient* as one metaphor to indicate Hong Kong, and *cuts and bruises* as another metaphor in order to imply that Hong Kong was seriously damaged by the protests. These words distinctly elaborate ordinary Chinese people's attitudes toward the protests/protestors, which is opposed the protest and further suggested that they may support the CCP's decision on harshly suppressing the protests and restore so-called law and order, essentially the CCP's authoritarian rule over the region. Furthermore, the two posts

suggest that Chinese people's stance on the protests is negative, this was partly due to the CCP's official media's propaganda, which represent a legitimate Self and delegitimate Other regarding this issue.

During the protests, the Hong Kong police as the pro-CCP force, were allied with the SAR government, which directly pursued the extradition policy and hindered the longstanding principle of the OCTS (The Atlantic Council, 2020). The escalation of protests and the police's violent crackdown on the protests/protestors became the main battleground in the competition of the 2019 Hong Kong protests' narrative. On the one hand, a great number of journalists from all over the world try to expose the excessive violence of Hong Kong police, while the Chinese government/the CCP has instead portrayed the police as strong defenders of the country's dignity and sovereignty on the other hand. For example, many posts of "protestors used violence against police officers" were spreading on Weibo when the protests gained momentum, one particularly popular story on Weibo involves a bald police called 'Liu Sir' (Chinese: 刘 sir), who was assaulted violently by a significant number of protesters. It is speculated that those protestors kicked, mauled, and attacked him with iron sticks and umbrellas before he drew his gun (Figure 5-3, see next page). Officer Liu, who has sustained some minor injuries from the incident, responded to the incident writing in a text: "[I] just hate the fact that they are also Chinese - it feels wrong to hit them and also wrong not to. It really pains me! (Koetse, 2019)"

Figure 5-3 Protestors attacked Officer Liu (Source: The People's Daily Weibo account)

On 7th August 2019, following the Kwai Chung protest, the People's Daily initiated two trending topics on Weibo, namely "#ReplyFromHongKongBaldLauSir#" and "#PoliceOfficerWeSupportYou#". The former amassed over 580 million views and 85,000 discussions, while the latter garnered more than 620 million views and 306,000 discussions (The Atlantic Council, 2020). When examining the content under the hashtag #ReplyFromHongKongBaldLauSir#, of the 346 posts selectively highlighted by People's Daily, 104 originated from accounts representing local governments or state-backed media. Furthermore, by analysing posts posted on 8th August 2019, between 9:36 a.m. and 10:22 a.m., nearly half (i.e., 48 out of 97 posts) came from official governmental institutions or state-controlled media. This pattern suggests a possibly orchestrated effort, potentially steered by the central propaganda department (ibid) (Figure 5-4, see next page).

Figure 5-4 The People's Daily post on Weibo, 7th August 2019 (Source: The Atlantic Council, 2020: 11)

After the protests, Officer Liu became a hero in China, as his image was circulated by both the Chinese state and social media (Figure 5-5, see below).

Figure 5-5 Image of the bald Officer Liu (Source: From Weibo netizen Liliyanzi)

Theme 2. Negative messaging: Hong Kong youth and protestors

In addition to the cheerleading messages that tried to represent the police as a positive and heroic public image during the protests, the Chinese state media on Weibo platform also utilised negative messaging intending to stigmatise the protesters. For example, the China Daily published a video on Weibo, portrayed the protestors as "*mobsters*", "*violent extremists*", "*the youth waste*" after the Prince Edward Station incident, which happened on 31st August 2019. According to the video, this incident was ignited by a verbal dispute in the metro station, then violent clashes broke out between demonstrators and pro-police citizens with fire extinguisher and umbrellas (The Atlantic Council, 2020: 15). However, considering the video only focuses on the protestors' violent actions and neglects the police's behaviour, thus, those people who viewed the videos tended to accept the narratives that the protests would bring instability to society and the protesters are a group of extremists. Amid this background, the video not only conceptualised a negative image of the protesters and portrayed them as extremists who undermine Hong Kong's rule of law on the one hand, and indirectly legitimise Hong Kong police officers' aggressive responses to the protestors on the other hand. In the meantime, by representing the protesters as 'mobsters' 'waste youth' and 'violent extremists', the CCP tries to not only transfer the public eye from concerning the police's actions of excessively using force but also invalidates the

protests in general by portraying the protesters as criminals, hence diminishing public's sympathy of the demonstrations. In addition, these narratives also reinforce the image that during the protests, the CCP and China are in the positive side and as legitimate Self, while delegitimising the Hong Kong protestors as negative Other.

Another popular incident discussed on Weibo is Fu Guohao's encounter with the protesters on 13th August 2019 at the Hong Kong International Airport. Fu is an employee of the Global Times but without a journalist's licence. However, his suspicious behaviour of trying to take feature photos of the protestors and hiding his identity caused the protesters to think that he was a Chinese intelligence agent. Because of this, Fu was tied to a luggage cart and beaten by the protesters, and those demonstrators had laser pointers aimed at Fu's eyes. During the attack, Fu said that "I support Hong Kong police, now you can beat me" (Wen and Wong, cited from Wu, 2020: 25), a phrase that was later used by the state media as the headline for articles celebrating his heroic and undaunting resistance to the "violent" protesters. Against this backdrop, the hashtag #IAlsoSupportHongKongPolice# swiftly became a hot search on Weibo, which received more than 130 million discussions and more than 8 billion reads (The Atlantic Council, 2020). Under the hashtag, one Weibo user comments:

> (3). When you *shouted out* you supported the Hong Kong police, you expressed your voice on behalf of the *1.4 billion people*. When you stood firm against the chaos, you became the embodiment of our nation's spirit, You are the *true hero of the Chinese people*; you *illustrated what a real Chinese person looks like*. You are the reflection of China's courage, a mirror of the resilience and strength we all aspire to have (@Nankeyimeng, 13th August 2019; my emphasis).

This comment suggests that the overall sentiment of the protests on Weibo was to condemn the protesters' violent actions and support Fu's so-called valorous resistance. For example, the term *shouted out* expressed how outrageous the ordinary Chinese people's feelings about the protestors' violent actions. However, it deliberately omitted what Chinese people shouted for. The comment also uses presupposition strategy, such as *1.4 billion people*, to indicate that the whole Chinese people supported Fu's patriotic action and support Hong Kong police against the protestors in light of confrontation and division, which created a mirage of unified Chinese national identity and legitimised the CCP's response to the protests. Nevertheless, what the Chinese

state media did not report is foreign reporters and Hong Kong councillors protected Fu at the scene, although they suspected that he was a Chinese intelligence agent.

In addition, Fu's amplification of support for the Hong Kong police is more than just a personal expression of political allegiance. Instead, it becomes a magnified representation, a voice that echoes not in isolation but as a collective reverberation that resonates with the entire nation's sentiments. In the given post, this voice is portrayed as a mirror reflecting the convictions and aspirations of 1.4 billion Chinese people. By terming an individual (i.e., Fu Guohao) as the 'true hero of the Chinese people', it profoundly elevates the person from an ordinary citizen to a symbol of nationalistic pride and identity. Thus, this post is not just about expressing support for the Hong Kong police, but about upholding and exemplifying values deemed essential and representative of the Chinese character. Such a portrayal conveys a profound message about shared values and nationalistic fervour.

Furthermore, the phrase 'illustrated what a real Chinese person looks like' underscores the intricate relationship between personal convictions and broader social expectations. It speaks of a deeper narrative where certain stances and beliefs are commended and considered benchmarks of genuine national identity. This narrative delineates the qualities, ethos, and convictions cherished and celebrated by the majority. However, underlying this commendation, an implicit distinction is also being made. As presented above, the idea of a 'real' Chinese person offers both an inclusionary and exclusionary narrative. It includes those who align with certain beliefs while subtly setting boundaries on what it means to truly belong. Such narratives shape public discourse, influence social perceptions, and play a pivotal role in moulding the Chinese national identity. Through such expressions, it may glimpse the powerful interplay of individual actions and the evolving contours of national identity in contemporary Chinese social media.

Compared the two above cases, which showed how Chinese social media discourse negatively represented the protestors, the third post focused on representation of the Hong Kong youth, collected from an economics blogger (@Tonghangzhongdewo) on Weibo. The blogger claims that the problem reflected in the protests is that young people in Hong Kong have fallen into a "colonial mentality". The blogger says:

> (4). The younger generation in Hong Kong seems to be drifting away from a *deep sense of patriotism*, often feeling disconnected from the vast expanse of mainland China. This is not merely a spontaneous sentiment but is rooted in the lingering

> effects of a *colonial mentality*. Such a mindset affects their perception of identity and hinders the city's potential trajectory towards greater prosperity within the broader Chinese framework. It is crucial to emphasise that the essence and vitality of Hong Kong, with its unique cultural background and dynamic economic landscape, are intricately tied to its relationship with China. Remember, without China's robust support and opportunities, and collaborative synergy, Hong Kong is worthless (@Tonghangzhongdewo, 15th August 2019; my emphasis).

This sentiment is reclaimed and echoed by many netizens on Weibo, who wrote comments such as "Without a country, you are nothing" (Koetse, 2019). From the post, the Chinese netizens condemned Hong Kong youth's 'colonial mentality' and mentioned that this has prevented Hong Kong's blooming. However, it is undeniable that before Hong Kong's handover in 1997, it was a renowned Asian financial centre and achieved significant progression even as a British colony. This achievement could not contribute to the people having a 'colonial mentality' or not, but instead to the basic rule and order of Hong Kong at that time. Nevertheless, when the handover finished, Hong Kong had transformed and lost some unique features due to the OCTS principle and the CCP's more authoritarian control. Because of the control, Hong Kong did not have real universal suffrage, which caused the 2014 Umbrella Movement.

On the other hand, the Chinese people admitted a lack of "sense of belonging" from Hong Kongers and tried to resort to the "patriotic education" issue. The term *sense of belonging* is a metaphor for the identity clash between Hong Kong and China. However, it cannot be solved only by education, as an education system always comes from the social and political systems. So to eliminate the "no sense of belonging", the Hong Kong government should restore the OCTS principle first and execute equilibrium between *One Country* and *Two Systems*, instead of *One Country* prioritised on *Two Systems*.

Theme 3. Negative messaging: Claims of Foreign Influence (over Chinese internal affairs)

Besides criticism of Hong Kong protestors and the Hong Kong youth, what roles the Western countries (i.e., the United States and the United Kingdom) played during the protests has caused severe criticism as well. One photo published by the CCTV's Weibo account, which focused on an American diplomat Julie Eadeh, meeting up with pro-democracy student leaders during the protests, was spread on Weibo on 8th

August 2019, with comments said that the US is “creating chaos and instability” in Hong Kong (Figure 5-6, see below).

Figure 5-6 American diplomat Julie Eadeh meeting up with Hong Kong pro-democracy leaders during the protests (Source: CCTV’s Weibo account, 8th August 2019)

Following this photo, is a related hashtag called #WhatIsAmericaUpTo# (Chinese: #美国居心何在#) which designed and shared by CCTV on Weibo. One commentator responded after the hashtag:

> (5). With its complexities and challenges, the US should be more reflective rather than casting its gaze on regions outside its domain, especially places like Hong Kong. Indeed, Hong Kong has always been and will remain, an integral part of China. The city, with its pulsating energy and rich history, is woven into the very fabric of Chinese civilisation and modernity. *The US has no right to interfere in Hong Kong’s affairs*; Hong Kong is China’s Hong Kong. We value international cooperation and respect, but it is *essential to remember the boundaries of sovereignty*. We hope Hong Kong is peaceful and stable (Anonymous, 8th August 2019; my emphasis).

Other netizens on Weibo also called the protesters to be rational; they mentioned:

> (6). The situation in Hong Kong is *getting more complex*, and I hope the protesters can *think rationally* about why they participated in these protests. They should *not let themselves become others’ guns*… I cannot imagine these young protestors waving the US flag during the protests. Nevertheless, foreigners will only see them

as Chinese instead of Hong Kongers when they leave this region (Anonymous, 8th August 2019; my emphasis).

These messages strongly accused the protesters of colluding with foreign countries (i.e. the United States, the United Kingdom, etc.) and suggested the United States/Western foreign forces is the "black hand" behind the whole protests. Hua Chunying, the then spokesperson of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Zhang Guoqing, an American issues expert at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, suggested that American is fomenting a "colour revolution" in Hong Kong. However, the evidence cited in these narratives included a range of disinformation, which falsely compared the 2019 Hong Kong protests with the previous colour revolutions as well as unsubstantiated claims about foreigners organising protests, leading the resistance to the police, and funding protesters (The Atlantic Council, 2020). This disinformation contained irrelevant evidence that did not prove but created the hallucination of foreign interference in Chinese internal affairs (ibid: 10). To sum up, both the Chinese state media and pro-China propaganda have followed the same messaging strategy, which includes employing disparaging terms to the protestors, exaggerating the extent of violence of the protests, and spreading baseless allegations that the protesters are colluding with foreign forces. By doing this, these narratives on Chinese media discredit the integrity of the protesters and the 'real face' of the protests on the one hand and try to shape and solidify the conspiracies around the protests and the pro-democracy camp on the other hand. Hence, legitimate Self and delegitimate Other.

5.3.2 WeChat: An Analysis of Discursive Themes

As aforementioned (see 5.2), the researcher systematically reads and analyses all 1304 articles in terms of the protests from another significant Chinese social media platform, WeChat. After applying keywords search (see Table 5-1 in 5.2), I found two dominant discursive themes on WeChat: (1). Nationalism and territory integrity; (2). Order and Law. The former theme focuses on China's national security and territory integrity, condemns Western interference in the protests and expresses China's vigilant stance toward Hong Kong's potential independence. While the latter theme focuses on representing protestors' brutal actions on the one hand, on the other hand, it pays more attention to the narrative and propagates how and why social stability and prosperity are significant to Hong Kong. To sum up, the two themes generally

corresponded to the Chinese state media's narrative (see 4.3), representing a prevalent sentiment from the Chinese public and indicating the Chinese government/the CCP's attitudes in terms of the Hong Kong protests. Below is the detailed analysis of these themes.

Theme 1: Nationalism and territory integrity

Nowadays, the propaganda of nationalism is rising from every aspect of China. For example, from the state, the intellectual and mainstream media. Nationalism in China is represented as the Century of Humiliation because a weakened China suffered from foreign aggressions and Western interventions from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century (Callahan, 2004; cited from Wu, 2020; also see 2.2.7 for more details). Since Xi Jinping's ruling in 2012, with the official motto of the "Chinese Dream" and the "China's Great Rejuvenation", the promotion of nationalism continued to grow (Kuhn, 2013). In the meantime, mass society is playing a significant role in constructing and spreading of nationalism, leading to more mutual influence between the state and the general public (Callahan, 2010; cited from Wu, 2020). It is suggested that the Chinese state media's narrative of nationalism is influenced by the ordinary netizen's online expression; in addition, online nationalism discourses have also constructed an alternative representation compared to the official's propaganda (Chen et al., 2019; Ma, 2018).

The nationalist sentiment expressed in Chinese social media provides an excellent chance to understand the Chinese general public's response to the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Although the protests were irrelevant to Hong Kong's independence, they still marked the most severe crisis since Hong Kong's handover to China in 1997, indirectly reflecting Hong Kongers' grievance with the OCTS principle and the CCP's rule. Against this backdrop, the CCP had to transfer the public's attention to foreign forces by propagating Western interference in Chinese internal affairs, hence reducing the pressure from the protests (He, 2017). According to Lee and Chan (2018), emphasising Western interference has been a usual trick for the CCP since the 2014 Umbrella Movement, where the narrative of foreign intervention 'delegitimises an action by defining it as something that is dubious and alien' (Lee and Chan, 2018: 153). More specifically, considering China's Century of Humiliation in the past and the intertwined relations between Hong Kong and the UK, the narrative of nationalism is particularly sensitive to the Chinese people, as this would recall their humiliating

memory in the past (Wang, 2012). According to Tang and Darr (2012), Chinese nationalism exhibited a strong anti-democratic, pro-authoritarian tendency throughout history, which hindered the public's demands for democratic change and influenced their attitude towards the protests' motives.

Through analysing WeChat's original articles, the researcher proved the above judgement that blaming and rallying the West (especially the United States and the British) was the most common narrative of nationalism, hence gaining support from the public. The analysis also indicates that foreign influence discourses are used to delegitimise the Hong Kong protestors. For instance, considering the U.S. passed and implemented the Hong Kong Human Rights and Democracy Act on 27th November 2019 by then President Donald Trump, one article scrutinises the operations of an organisation called the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), accusing the U.S. of interfering in Chinese internal affairs:

> (7). The *infamous* National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in the United States has a '*skeleton in the cupboard*' of leading subversion and creating colour revolutions in the whole world, and it is especially *good at* street politics, such as they are currently doing in Hong Kong…I am sure that the NED is the *biggest black hand* behind the Hong Kong protests, which aims to 'fishing in the troubled water' and take this opportunity to damage Hong Kong's stability and prosperity. This d***ed organisation is *far more detrimental* than those Hong Kong protestors on the front line (Xiong Jia, 15th, July 2019; my emphasis).

This comment generally represented the U.S. negatively during the protests, especially terms such as *skeleton in the cupboard* and (especially) *good at*, these terms implied that the U.S. has a long history of affecting other countries' internal conflicts and is good at this domain. Another noteworthy is the phrases *colour revolutions, street politics* and *black hand.* Linking the protests with the colour revolution, Chinese netizens have expressed their vigilant feeling that the West manipulated the protests, hence using *the black hand* as a metaphor to represent the foreign forces negatively. *Street politics* is a metonymic strategy used in this comment, as the netizens use this phrase to indicate the protests per se. Given that the word politics in Chinese context links to (improper) power and/or private transactions, it does not have a positive representation. Thus, the whole comment suggested a negative representation of the protests and a vigilance emotion to the Western influence and/or infiltration.

Besides the U.S., considering its intertwined history and relations with Hong Kong, the British is another target for condemning their (politicians') response to the protests, representing them as intervention to Chinese internal affairs. For example, when the British expressed concerns about freedom and democracy in the protests, some articles suggested that the British did not bring enough freedom and democracy in Hong Kong under its rule, such as the following article:

> (8). Britain *has no sovereignty* over this piece of Chinese land (i.e., Hong Kong), no rights to govern, and no rights to supervise. The two sides (i.e., Britain and Hong Kong) have long been broken up long time ago. Today, Hong Kong has returned to China for 22 years, but some British politicians are still stuck in the era of *barbarism*, *bullying and colonialism*, trying to interfere in China's sovereignty. *Fanning the flames*, *planning in the dark room*, spreading rumours on the streets, lest the world will not be chaotic. Why not (the British) go to North America to relive its colonial dream? Instead of *begging for mercy* in front of the United States like a dog and following suit? To put it bluntly, the *roots of bullying the weak* in Britain's minds have not been disappeared. (Housha Yueguang, 13th, August 2019; my emphasis)

The post manifests a severe critique against British interference, which suggests that Chinese people took the notion that the Westerners, especially the U.S. and the British, influenced and manipulated the protests. By emphasising 'Britain has no sovereignty', the post anchors its argument in a historical rectification, asserting that any past rights Britain had over Hong Kong have long since disappeared. However, Britain continuously provoked internal conflicts and protests to interfere with China's unification, questioning the CCP's authority to rule Hong Kong. The dynamic juxtaposition of terms such as 'barbarism', 'bullying', and 'colonialism' not only condemns Britain's historical imperialist endeavours but also implies a perpetual and inherent flaw of this country.

Furthermore, the imagery of 'fanning the flames' and 'planning in the dark room' evokes notions of fraud, suggesting that British interventions are driven by ulterior motives, seeking to destabilise rather than genuinely assist. The post artfully underscores a narrative of British decline by juxtaposing Britain's past imperialism image with its contemporary role in geopolitics, inferred by its relationship with the United States. The sharp insults, 'begging for mercy like a dog' is particularly telling, as it relegates

Britain's current international posture. The concluding statement, 'the roots of bullying the weak in Britain's minds have not disappeared', suggests an unchanging and by extension, untrustworthy British character. Through the combination of historical allusions, strong metaphors and severe critique, this post seeks to delegitimise British influence and fortify Hong Kong's position as an integral part of China while highlighting a broader narrative of the dynamics of global power shifting (i.e., the East rises while the West declines).

As previously stated, the CCP ignited the so-called patriotism, essentially nationalism during the protests, to legitimise Self and delegitimise Other (see 2.2.7). Not surprisingly, a series of articles used patriotism to shame the Hong Kong protestors and maintain sovereign territorial integrity. One article wrote:

> (9). Since in the 'One Country, Two Systems' (OCTS) framework, Hong Kong enjoys the unique privilege of maintaining institutional distinctions from China, preserving its cherished capitalist system. *However*, under the condition of 'One Country', the identity of Hong Kong residents is intertwined with their Chinese heritage. The bond is not just geographical or administrative, but deeply rooted in shared history and culture. As such, it is a *must* that Hong Kong people identify themselves as Chinese, and they *must* embrace the land with *love and patriotism* (Yingxiongjian, 25th, July 2019; my emphasis).

The above post acknowledges Hong Kong's distinct identity under the OCTS framework. By starting with 'Since in the…', the text foregrounds its argument on an accepted premise, suggesting that the uniqueness of the 'Two Systems' is given. Nevertheless, while some Chinese netizens admitted and accepted the OCTS principle, their understanding of the OCTS is "One country" must priority to "Two systems", which takes the same propaganda stance with the CCP. Thus, through expressing the so-called patriotic spirit, this comment surreptitiously criticised and delegitimised the protestors, which suggested the increased division and lack of unity between China and Hong Kong was due to the latter did not accept the same identity with the Chinese (national identity), hence led to the crisis.

Yet, as the discourse progresses, the conjunction 'however' serves as a turning point, signifying a shift in tone and content. In addition, the repetition of the word 'must' accentuates a normative expectation for Hong Kong residents, indicating a perceived obligation for them to possess patriotic feelings towards China. On the other hand,

terms such as ‘love and patriotism’ are practical and loaded with ideological undertones. This term resonates with a specific set of values, emotions, and responsibilities towards the nation and, by extension, frames the so-called ‘correct’ sentiment for Hong Kong residents to harbour.

Theme 2. Order and Law

Besides discursive themes on nationalism and territory integrity, another important theme on WeChat articles is Order and Law. In this theme, violence or related terms (i.e., violent, violent rioter/act/riot) is ubiquitous with its first appeared on late June, which selectively amplified the violence perpetrated by protesters on the one hand and ignored the police’s violence on the other hand (Wu, 2020). An article about the city-wide protests and strikes that have forced the closure of many universities and subway stations begins with:

> (10). The unrest in Hong Kong *intensified significantly* yesterday, with aggressive and destructive actions such as *beating, smashing, looting, and burning* everywhere. The aggressors broadened their violent actions, targeting not just patriots, local police, establishment members, and visitors from the mainland China, but also regular citizens, children, and foreigners. *Over 60 individuals sustained injuries*, with *two in a severe state*. The ongoing situation has deteriorated and out of control, marking the darkest moment in Hong Kong since the riots commenced. (Qianxian, 12th, November 2019; my emphasis).

Figure 5-7 (see next page) is images collected from the same article, which vividly illustrates the violence and destruction the protestors caused to the city:

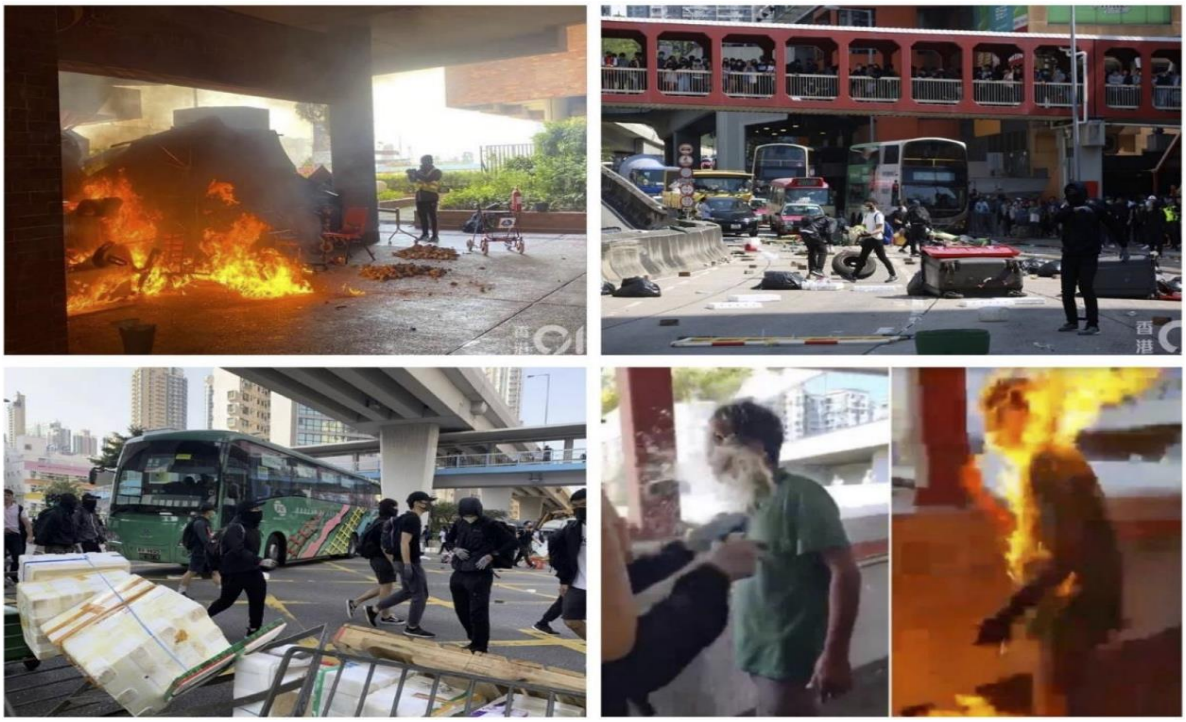

Figure 5-7 Images collected from Qianxian's article (Source: Wu, 2020: 27)

The second article writes as follows:

> (11). Protestors dressed in black frequently *smashed* banks, stores, and metro stops. Numerous common citizens were *wounded* and some even *fainted*. Actress Celine Ma sustained a head injury and was bloodied after capturing footage of the unrest on the streets…The appearance and behaviour of these protestors *closely resemble* those of *terrorists* (Du Rulong, 15th, October 2019; my emphasis).

The above two articles and images portrayed the fierce disruption in the protests by insisting the number of injured people and using terms such as *beating/smashing/looting/burning* and *wounded/fainted* to demonise the protestors, represented how the protestors violently confronted the ordinary citizen, polices and/or governments (i.e., establishment figures) during the protests. By negative expression and illustration of the protestors (i.e., no different from terrorists), the articles and images implied rule and order must be restored as soon as possible in Hong Kong (i.e., the *darkest* day since the riots), hence legitimise the CCP's action on brutal suppression the protests and delegitimise the protests as destroyers of rule and order. Considering attitudes against violence are rather uncontroversial from the Chinese side, describing the protests as extremely violent is an effective way to generate public outcry from the consumers of social media content (Wu, 2020: 28).

In addition, some articles focus on emphasising the importance of social stability and prosperity and suggest how the protests have seriously threatened social safety. For instance, one article writes:

> (12). It is essential to recognise that genuine concepts of '*democracy, freedom, and human rights*' are founded upon the prosperity and stability of a nation. It is in such a secure environment that *true freedom manifests*. When a country ensures the safety and well-being of its citizens, it paves the way for them to pursue their passions and interests without hindrance. Genuine freedom is not just about individual rights but also about being given the assurance of security by one's nation, enabling one to engage in activities and pursuits they cherish (Zhuozixiansheng, 2019; my emphasis).

Another article echoed the above sentiment and suggested the protestors' disregard to social order and their destructive behaviour to the society:

> (13). When observing the actions and statements of numerous youths in Hong Kong, they might not fully grasp the nature of *freedom and human rights*. In their perspective, simply chanting the mantras of *democracy and freedom* seems to justify compromising public order, community amenities, and the general well-being of the populace. Proper understanding of these concepts does not equate to neglecting social harmony and welfare; instead, it harmoniously integrates individual rights with collective responsibility (Qin Shuo, 17th, November 2019; my emphasis).

In these narratives, the terms *democracy, freedom and human rights* appeared alternately with the sentiment of stability and prosperity, to describe what a well-functioning Hong Kong society should look like in Chinese netizens' minds. Although many of them acknowledged the protests are related to democracy, freedom and human rights *per se*, some of them may not understand what real democracy, freedom and human rights are, thus they confused these notions with China's development (i.e., the more stability and prosperity in China, the more democracy, freedom and human rights Hong Kong will enjoy). However, the protests have damaged China's stability and prosperity, hence Hong Kong will undertake the result as well. Obviously, compared with the Hong Kong side's narrative of the protests, the Chinese side's narrative of the protests focuses on condemning the damage the protesters have done to Hong Kong and China, thus forming a sharp contrast with the Hong Kong side.

5.4 Findings and Discussion

From the above analysis, bottom-up discourses from the Chinese social media platforms overwhelmingly expressed positive messaging on Hong Kong police forces and the SAR government/the CCP, and negative emotions towards the protest/protestors/western forces (i.e., many netizens used the buzzword “waste youth” describing the protestors). For example, Weibo and WeChat accounts originate from Chinese officials who defined the protests as “riots” with violence and vandalism. The posts from ordinary netizens also strongly present a bifurcation in identity formation between the Chinese and the Hong Kongers, they present the protestors’ identities as “rioters”, although they were just fighting for their freedom. This also proved the study conducted by Qian (2020), who claimed that “the state-owned media (i.e., The People’s Daily) developed a negative identity of the protestors by identifying them to be rioters, who are impeding the law and peace of the country” (Qian, 2020: 14), although the protests began peacefully with the Hong Kongers expressing their democracy and freedom of speech. However, the introduction and withdrawal of the extradition bill questioned the authority of the SAR government and the CCP’s legitimation to rule Hong Kong.

On the other hand, by expressing so-called patriotism, but essentially nationalism, Chinese netizens show their unflinching support toward the government to take brutal measures and actions to suppress the protests. According to Gries (2005), nationalism has been a pillar of the CCP’s legitimacy and sustains the party’s control (see 2.2.7). From the above analysis, many people in China have a negative attitude towards the protestors and accuse the Western nations manipulated the protests and interference in China’s internal affairs. Although some netizens mentioned the OCTS principle and expressed sympathy toward the protests, they understand that *One country* must prioritises *Two systems* and support the extradition bill with rationale as the bill may plug the loophole. From their perspectives, the Hong Kongers failed to understand how vital China’s unification and territorial integrity would benefit Hong Kong, and the majority continue to persist in developing the identity of a unified nation through mutual co-existence between China and Hong Kong. This solid patriotic and nationalistic vigour indicated that the CCP had successfully manipulated the Chinese media to legitimise itself and transferred the public’s attention to Western interference in Chinese internal affairs. This manipulation has led the netizens to reject alternative discourses from Other side and shape their view of democracy and impacted how they

sympathised with the pro-democracy motives of the protests. In turn, the netizens have unwittingly legitimised Self (i.e., the CCP) and delegitimised Other (i.e., the protestors).

Besides media manipulation, the analysis also suggested that the Chinese state media discourse (top-down) has affected its social media discourse (bottom-up) and their relations are intertwined. That is, both state and social media discourses portrayed the protests/protestors and the Western forces' influence in negative messaging, and positive messaging in support of the Hong Kong police forces, the SAR government and the CCP's actions to suppress the protests and restore rule and order. However, these discourses do not represent wholly Chinese people's attitudes toward the protests due to media control and censorship (see 2.3.2). While the state media discourse focuses on the Self representations of the protests as *truth* and avoids talking about more profound and sensitive topics behind the protests, such as identity clashes between Hong Kong and China due to the CCP's authoritarian rule and infringed autonomy of Hong Kong, and erosions of the OCTS principle, social media discourse generated by ordinary users shows resistance and challenges to the official/mainstream media discourses and narratives of the protests, implying part of the CCP's failure in social media propaganda.

Tufekci and Wilson (2012: 3) state that 'social media alter the key tenets of collective action […] and, in doing so, create new vulnerabilities for even the most durable of authoritarian regimes' (i.e., China) (cited from KhosraviNik and Unger, 2015: 224). This suggests that social media 'accelerated but was not wholly responsible for those vulnerabilities' (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2015: 224). Although the CCP's propaganda system applies techniques such as persuasion on social media, which means convincing others to change their viewpoint and take a given course of action to control and shape ordinary netizens' ideologies, the analysis suggests that both ideology and propaganda embedded in critical language dimensions. Lasswell (1995: 13) states that 'propaganda in its broadest sense is the technique of influencing human action by manipulating of representations'. By defining ideology as a broad structural arrangement which gives uncontroversial meaning to a series of mutually defining political concepts, Freeden (2003: 54) emphasises 'the necessary competition of ideologies over political languages in dealing with the uncertainty of meaning'. Against this backdrop, the CCP has elaborated a rich repertoire of representations, including slogans, rhetoric, terminology and various symbolic forms such as advertisements, posters, and news programs, all appearing in designated forms (Zhang, 2020). These

form a political discourse with semantic certainty and explanatory finality, is what George Orwell in 1984 termed ‘newspeak’, which is a ‘controlled language with simplified grammar and limited vocabulary that helps maintain political order by eliminating alternative thinking’ (Zhang, 2020: para 4). In China, political discourse is created by linking key vocabulary with political forces (Zhang, 2020). This is achieved by legitimising one meaning of vocabulary and delegitimising the others (Freeden, 2003; cited from Zhang, 2020). However, the increased digital activism and public engagement on social media have disrupted the CCP’s tactic and challenged the official narrative. As Zhang (2020) notes, online social media platforms encourage public participation and can reverse, reaffirm and reshape meanings, affecting the CCP’s political propaganda and power dynamics between the state and society.

For example, although some netizens were aware of the CCP’s motives for tightening control over Hong Kong and minimising its autonomy, they still responded to the protests on Weibo as “respect to those people who are striving for democracy and freedom in Hong Kong” before they became victims of the so-called “human flesh search” (i.e., other Weibo users screenshot their comments and publish their personal details and labelling them traitors). One blogger even reposted their photos and profiles, making this incident influential and hence serving as an indirect warning to other users not to present their incorrect political stance in terms of the protests. On WeChat platform, although response on Public Account articles mainly expressing on legitimising Self and positive messaging on the SAR government/the CCP (see 5.2.2), some comments still mentioned notions such as democracy, freedom and human rights, and many netizens admitted the protests were about to strive for democracy and freedom *per se*, which are not wholly enjoyed in China.

To sum up, compared to state media’s macro propaganda, which refers to the large-scale, systematic dissemination of information, ideas, or narratives by authoritative state institutions to shape public opinion and reinforce state-sanctioned ideologies, social media provide space for ordinary netizens to express their limited sympathy and/or natural feeling about the protests. However, due to the distance (of the protests) and media censorship, Chinese people lacked sufficient information regarding the 2019 Hong Kong protests, which may lead to the possibility of bias and prevented them from developing an informed understanding by just reading a few Weibo posts or WeChat articles. Thus, how they view and judge a political event (i.e., the protests) on social media is mainly bounded by their beliefs/ideologies and the political systems.

Besides, social media algorithms might enhance these effects by providing what netizens enjoy reading (McNeal, 2014; Nunez, 2016; cited from Kou et al., 2017). According to Wang (2007), due to globalisation and the development of communication technologies, Chinese people could be exposed to Western-style democracy in recent years; however, their deep-rooted response to social movements/protests (a key feature of modern democracies) was generally opposing, this probably because China has experienced paternalistic mode of governance for thousands of years. Thus, their attitude toward democracy is complicated and vague. In the meantime, the chilling effect of social media censorship in China caused the sympathy and honest expression from the alternative narratives on social media to struggle to challenge or rival the dominant top-down discourse, particularly in such an influential movement in China, although the former (bottom-up) shows an extent of challenge and resistance to the latter (top-down).

5.5 Conclusion

In heavily censored society, social media has become an alternative avenue for the general public to 'generate oppositional narratives that are different from mainstream media' (Kou et al., 2017: 809). Through the analysis of Chinese social media discourses, this chapter suggests that the majority of Chinese netizens mainly expressed the negative attitude toward the protests/protestors/Western forces interfering of Chinese internal affairs and expressed positive messaging on the Hong Kong police forces/the SAR government/the CCP, which is the same representation of the Chinese state media discourse. Due to the distance (to the protests) issue, most netizens lack sufficient information about the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Thus, biased viewpoints (compared to the West social media platforms) appeared on Chinese social media platforms to representing the protests. By expressing the so-called patriotism, essentially nationalism, Chinese netizens unconsciously legitimised the CCP and delegitimised Other, as nationalism is the main pillar of the CCP's legitimacy and sustained support from the public. However, compared to the (top-down) state media propaganda, the increased participation of ordinary netizens has led to (bottom-up) social media discourse challenged and resisted the official/mainstream media narratives through reproduction and interpretation of the official rhetoric, such as some netizens paid their tribute and supported the protests. Nevertheless, by censoring such narratives on social media, most netizens still take the same stance and stand firmly with the CCP in terms of the protests. However, when the researcher switched

attention to the discourse from the Western social media platforms (i.e., Twitter, Facebook and YouTube), it seems a diametrically opposed representation of the protests appeared, which will be elaborate in the next chapter.

Chapter 6. Western Social Media Discourse: Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Introduction

In the second half of 2019, Hong Kong's pro-democracy protests gained momentum, attracting the Western media's attention. From the Chinese standpoint, the Chinese state and social media represented the protests with negative expression (i.e., violence, riot) and caused severe divisions between Hong Kong and China. In stark contrast, Western traditional media and social media platforms typically portrayed the demonstrations in a more favourable light, emphasising their organised nature and aspirations for democracy. This differential representation was evident in both the headlines and accompanying images.

In recent years, social movements consisting of offline collective actions (i.e., street protesting) and online participation (i.e., disseminating information, online discussion, etc.) have emerged (Kou et al., 2017). In the meantime, offline actions and online (i.e., social media) public discourses are often co-developed and co-existed, with the latter playing a significant role in the former, such as disseminating feasible guidelines and organising activities for the next step on the one hand (Monroy-Hernández et al., 2013; Qu et al., 2011; cited from Kou et al., 2017) and gain broad solidarity and support from people in different regions on the other hand (Starbird and Palen, 2012; State and Adamic, 2015; cited from Kou et al., 2017). Notably, with the support of social media features such as hashtags, location tags and user profile features, slogans and agendas of social movements are easily chanted and spread (Kou et al., 2017: 807-808).

While Chinese social media operates under rigorous censorship, platforms outside its jurisdiction played a pivotal role in both amplifying the protests and lobbying international support for Hong Kong. Given this context, this chapter delves into the discourses emerging from two influential Western platforms, Twitter and Facebook. The goal is to comprehend external perceptions of the protests. Preliminary analysis suggests that the discourse on these platforms predominantly critiques the CCP's handling of the situation and extends support to the protestors. Nevertheless, a segment of the discourse also challenged the legitimacy of the protests, siding with the CCP's perspective.

6.2 Western Social Media Data Analysis of Twitter

Twitter is an important social media platform for 'collaborative storytelling, news sharing and also acting as a catalyst for global social movements' such as Occupy Wall Street in 2014; Black Lives Matter in 2016 and the Egyptian uprisings in 2018 (Bhatia and Ross, 2022: 120). Due to its very nature of egalitarian democratisation of information and opinion sharing, Twitter users are likely to participate in different sociocultural contexts (Bhatia and Ross, 2022). This also leads to the creation of 'echo chambers', which indicates that 'in-group community building is influential on social media' (Bhatia and Ross: 121). The freedom of choosing which account to follow or clinging to one narrative while resisting another creates a closed system that can prevent the free flow of competing voices on Twitter (Matuszewski and Szabó, 2019), thus it may potentially foster higher levels of extremism (Hong and Kim, 2016).

Aligned with the objectives of this thesis, the researcher predominantly concentrated on tweets originating from Hong Kongers, aiming to discern their specific narrative and representation concerning the protests, rather than a broader collection of personal opinions. After skimming all relevant tweets, and according to the aforementioned rule (also see 3.5.4 for the collected Twitter hashtags and their corresponding number of tweets), I have identified two discursive themes, namely (1). Positive representation of Hong Kong's identity; (2). Negative representation of government and police actions. The ensuing sections will delve into a comprehensive analysis of these themes.

Theme 1. Positive representation of Hong Kong's identity

This theme focuses on Hong Kong's identity and critical values and illustrates how protesters attempt to reconceptualise their unique identity through discourse on Twitter. For instance, the posts from protestors below represented the Hong Kong protests as a war which aims to maintain Hong Kong's democracy and freedom, and represented those protesters in Hong Kong as undaunted warriors who will fight until the last minute for victory:

> (1) We must fight on the streets; we must fight on the fields; we must fight on each inch of our *cherished and beloved land*. We must continue, victory will belong to us! #antiELABMovement #FreedomHongKong #HKprotests (my emphasis).

(2) Hong Kong is beautiful and special not only because it has democracy and freedom. More importantly, every people in this land with their *pure spirit* strive for democracy and freedom. We *stand for freedom*, and we *will never yield* to the CCP's authoritarian rule. #SOSHK #antiELABMovement #FreeHongKongRevolutionOurTimes (my emphasis).

(3) This scene is magnificent but also sad for Hong Kong. We Hong Kongers *resolutely fight for democracy and freedom*; we *totally reject the extradition bill*! To each brave protester, you have gained full support from millions of Hong Kongers. You are not alone. #AntiELAB #StandwithHongKong (my emphasis).

(4) We must *not give up*; we must *continue to the end*. We are *righteous*, and thus we can fight *with confidence and glory*. We must *safeguard* this land, no matter what cost it will take. #HKProtests #antiELABMovement (my emphasis).

By using metaphor strategies, the above tweets vividly represent the protestors as 'soldiers' who have complete loyalty to Hong Kong, the beloved region where they are living, and indicate that the situation in Hong Kong is complicated, dangerous and severe. As a mutual homeland to all Hong Kong people, Hong Kong needs to be guarded at this critical moment. Subsequently, by using personified strategy (i.e., every people with pure spirit), these representations not only indicate Hong Kongers' resolve and fragility but also illustrate their interconnectedness (Bhatia and Ross, 2022). The repeated phrases (i.e., we must…) as the unifying pronoun emphasises collectively through the topos of similarity, which refers to a rhetorical strategy rooted in discourse analysis and is part of the broader realm of topoi or commonplace arguments. Within this framework, the topos of similarity underscores the shared characteristics, beliefs, or values between two entities, ideas, or situations. This strategy leverages commonalities to bridge conceptual gaps, forging a connection or equivalence between subjects that might otherwise seem unrelated or distinct. By emphasising shared characteristics or experiences, it can produce a sense of mutual understanding, subtly guiding the audience towards a particular viewpoint or stance, thereby making it a potent tool in persuasive communication and serving to legitimise the cause (Wodak et al., 1999; cited from Bhatia and Ross, 2022: 127). In addition, words and phrases related to defence (i.e., safeguard, fight, never give up, etc.) have the effect of categorising the protests as a justified social movement, which strives for democracy and freedom, hence generating sympathy from ordinary people. At the same time,

these words have positively represented the protesters as undaunting warriors who showed their resolved determination to guard the city until the last minute, hence legitimise the protests and protestors action.

In addition, the rally cry effect from the above tweets has provided a new perspective on understanding Hong Kongers' identity. Although there has sometimes been prejudice against those who are not ethnically local (i.e., Hong Kong native prejudices against Chinese immigrants) (Bhatia and Ross, 2022), the protests, have evolved into conflicts between Hong Kongers' identity and the Chinese national identity. At the same time, based on their attitudes toward the protests, Hong Kongers have been divided into two camps (i.e., yellow and blue); the yellow camp stands to support the protest, while the blue camp is against the protest (ibid: 127). The hostile divisions between the two camps have further intensified due to the protests, so that using the term "Hong Kongers" after the protests "does not so much designate a people defined by blood or history but acts as a symbol of resistance and political participation" (Laikwan, 2020: 214). These divisions may seem ironic, considering Hong Kongers have never been more united in their quest for socio-political change until the 2019 Hong Kong protests (Bhatia and Ross, 2022: 128).

Furthermore, the use of social media platforms has changed the nature of the protests. For instance, according to Bhatia and Ross (2022), hashtags such as #SOSHK, #FreeHK and #HKProtests on Twitter have elevated the protests from local, to a "global, epochal event… [aided by] the role of Western or global and Hong Kong media (i.e. non-mainland media) as a fundamental driver of the events themselves… [t]his has been a media-driven, tele-genic movement from the very beginning" (Bhatia and Ross, 2022: 128). In the meantime, social media has enabled protesters to establish a dialogue with the outside world, and thus, to some extent, spread and control narratives shaped by the outside world.

Theme 2. Negative representation of government and the police actions

Considering the protests were instigated partly because of the government's response, it is a critical perspective to examine how the SAR government's response to the demonstrations was represented by the general public on Twitter. Below are some reactions to the SAR government and the then-CE Carrie Lam from the perspective of people who may support the protests:

(5) Although mobs attack and beat the general public and the protests have generally evolved into more severe, our CE Carrie Lam shows no *sympathy but indifference*. #SaveHongKong #antiELABMovement #HongKongProtests (my emphasis).

(6) She (i.e., Carrie Lam) condemns the protests by calling our protesters mobs. At the same time, she calls herself "*mother*" and seemingly behaves like a mum without responding to her child's request. How dare she says she is a qualified mother of Hong Kong people? #antiELABMovement #StandWithHongKong (my emphasis).

(7) Carrie Lam pretends to show some *soft* attitudes toward us, but we will not be fooled again. She is totally a *deceiver* without true words. #FreeHongKong #NoExtraditionBill (my emphasis).

(8) Carrie Lam is lying to the whole World, and we Hong Kongers *have lost trust and have no patience* for her. We are completely against the extradition bill. #HKProtests #StandWithHongKong (my emphasis).

The tweets above present a powerful and emotive critique of Hong Kong's Chief Executive (CE) Carrie Lam, anchored in the lexicon of betrayal, parental negligence, and deception. In the first two tweets, there is a juxtaposition between the violent actions of 'mobs' and the purported inaction or indifference of Lam. This constructs the image of Lam as an unresponsive, unempathetic and iron-hearted leader, which indirectly corresponded to what the SAR government did (i.e., suppression) of the protests. Particularly with the familial metaphor, Lam is described as a 'mother' and then indirectly connected to the notion of being 'soft'. By referencing her self-styling as a 'mother', the tweet creates a dissonance between the expectations of a mother's image as caring, protective, and responsive and Lam's neglect and dismissiveness towards her 'children' (i.e., the Hong Kong public). According to Bhatia and Ross (2022: 132), the metaphorical and symbolic honorific of the 'mother of a nation' is rarely, if ever, self-conferred but is the result of a long life of service or of having played a significant role in improving the lives of the citizenry or even of establishing the socio-political system. Against this backdrop, Carrie Lam's self-representation as 'mother' can be seen as a condescending attitude to the protestors, which enraged them and led to more tweets using vicious language to attack her.

At the same time, it is interesting that the term ‘mob’ has become a contentious arena between the protestors and the officials. For instance, the word ‘mob’ was used by the SAR government to refer to those violent protesters. At the same time, those people who support the protests used the same term to refer to the police’s violent actions toward the protestors, hence strengthening ‘their narrative around the government and police as oppressors and citizens as the victims’ (Bhatia and Ross, 2022: 128). According to these tweets, it is indicated that from one side, in addition to repeated meaningless cliches, Carrie Lam did not have enough ability to control and deal with the severe situation. By using negative words and phrases to vividly mock the then-CE Carrie Lam, the protestors effectively legitimised the protests by de-legitimising the SAR government both from politically and morally.

Tweets (7) and (8) intensify the critique, moving from Lam’s neglect to active deception. Lam is constructed as a ‘deceiver’ who offers no ‘true words’ and is accused of lying to the ‘whole World’. This discursive choice serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it presents Lam’s interactions and communications as flawed, inadequate and intentionally misleading. Secondly, by suggesting that she is misleading the entire world, the discourse amplifies the scale of her deception, elevating the protests from a regional issue to a matter of global concern. Finally, the assertion that Hong Kongers have ‘lost trust’ and have ‘no patience’ for her casts the protestors as once-trusting children who have been repeatedly betrayed, reinforcing the narrative of Lam’s failure as a ‘mother’ figure. While not directly referenced in the tweets’ body, the hashtags play a pivotal role in framing the discourse. They anchor the tweets within a broader narrative of resistance (i.e., #StandWithHongKong, #FreeHongKong) and opposition to specific legislative actions (i.e., #NoExtraditionBill, #antiELABMovement).

In addition to focusing on the government’s actions toward the protests, another prevalent topic on Twitter pertained to the violent actions of the police. Given that previous social movements in Hong Kong were predominantly peaceful, the prominence of this topic on Twitter is somewhat unexpected. Below are some tweets from the protest supporters’ perspective when talking about the police’s actions:

(9) The brutal action of the Hong Kong police has been *unimaginable* in the past. Even now, they still *do not apologise* to the victims but are *getting more violent*. They must pay the consequences #HongKongProtests #antiELABMovements (my emphasis).

(10) The violent action from the Hong Kong police is *nonselective and prevalent*. They *randomly and unbridled* attacked and beat those people who were suspected protestors, like *crushing ants*. All their actions suggested that Hong Kong is becoming a police state like the Chinese mainland. #SOSHongKong #HongKongProtests #StandWithHongKong (my emphasis).

(11) What is happening in Hong Kong now? Can you imagine that the riot police *shot* to the journalists? It is so *bloody and scary*. Are we expecting another *decimation* in the next step? #StandWithHongKong #antiELABMovement (my emphasis).

From the above tweets, using dysphemism (i.e., negative words and phrases) such as 'brutality action', 'getting more violent' directly expresses how violent the behaviour of the police is towards the protestors. By intensifying the police's brutal actions (i.e., shot) toward the journalists, these tweets also carried ideological meaning. On the one hand, shots to journalists may cause them to become blind, thus the police could continue their brutal actions toward other protestors without scrutiny (Bhatia and Ross, 2022). On the other hand, by intensifying the police's hostile and indifferent actions through phrases such as 'still no apologies', and 'getting more violent', denotes the police's lack of sympathy to the victims and thus amplifies their terrible image. At the same time, using these words also highlights the protesters' fragility and helplessness and shaped their victim image, hence legitimising the protests from the protestors' perspective.

In addition, by labelling and representing the police as 'Hong Kong police' or 'the riot police', these tweets may support the protesters' claim that Hong Kong is morphing into a police state like mainland China (Bhatia and Ross, 2022). Compared to the ordinary police who carry out their regular duties, the Hong Kong police have been represented as 'riot police' in the protesters' narrative, a label and categorisation that carries negative connotations and suggests that the police may use damaging force to the protestors. This is further highlighted through another representation in tweets, where the protesters are represented as ants. By doing this, these tweets from ideological and identity perspectives increase the distance between the protesters and police, and shape starkly contrasting images between the two sides (i.e., the police and protestors) (Bhatia and Ross, 2022). On the one hand, the police were negatively labelled and represented as 'violent' and 'brutal'; on the other hand, the protesters are positively or neutrally characterised and represented as 'people', 'Hong Kong

protesters', and 'journalists', who are diametrically opposed in status, reflecting a victim mentality (ibid).

6.3 Western Social Media Data Analysis of Facebook

By collecting and analysing data from the Facebook platform, the researcher identified four discursive themes: (1). Relationship between Hong Kong and China - which focusing the attitude of relations between the two regions, whether the protests would affect Hong Kong's political autonomy, and how the Chinese central government's response would influence Hong Kong; (2). Attitudes toward the protests - an interesting theme, as part of Hong Kongers discussed whether they should support or against the protests; (3). Actions of the police - which similar to Twitter, indicated people's debate on whether the police actions toward the protests were reasonable and proper; (4). The CCP - a relatively normal and unavoidable topic when discussing protests in Hong Kong (i.e., the 2014 Umbrella Movement), netizens mainly expressed their concerns about the CCP's authoritarian rule in China would be implemented in Hong Kong in the near future.

Theme 1. Relationship between Hong Kong and China

This theme focused on ordinary netizens' response in terms of Hong Kong's autonomy, especially political autonomy, under more direct or indirect interference from the Chinese central government/the CCP. As aforementioned (see chapter 5), the 2019 Hong Kong protests explicit appeal was against the extradition bill, but what it challenged was the authority of the CCP's authority to rule in the region. For instance, an condemn expression below uses an idiom of defying the authority of the CCP:

> (13). Do not emphasise cliches such as '*Blood is thicker than water*' anymore. Do you really understand what is happening in Hong Kong during this *turbulent summer*? (my emphasis).

This post brings to the forefront a conflict between simplified perceptions and the complexity of real-world events. In this post, the term 'Blood is thicker than water' is an idiom which stresses that Hong Kongers and Chinese people share the same cultural and ethnic roots and suggests that the people from both sides (i.e., Hong Kong and China) should seek common ground while reserving differences and avoid direct conflict and confrontation with each other. While the latter of the post expressed Hong

Kongers' sentiments of anxiety and worry about the protests' future on the one hand and indicated that they are out on a limb on the other hand. Furthermore, the choice of word such as 'turbulent' underscores the magnitude and intensity of the situation in Hong Kong. By pairing it with 'summer', the post provides a temporal frame, hinting at the rapid and potentially unexpected nature of the protests.

Nevertheless, some netizens expressed more sensible statement about the protests:

> (14). The value or definition of those protests should not be framed into '*who is the winner*' or '*who is the righteous side*'. We need to think, what makes people go on the street? What can the SAR government do to *restart the conversation*? How to *ease the conflicts* and *standoff* between the Chinese government and the Hong Kong people? *Bare hands people* (relatively) can never beat the *armed government*, that is why the government should be humbled and listen to the people (my emphasis).

This statement reflects the attempt to alleviate the protest through a peaceful interaction between the government and protestors and let both sides understand the demands of each other. To begin, the opening line "The value or definition of those protests should not be framed into 'who is the winner' or 'who is the righteous side'" challenges the binary narrative often assigned to political conflicts, suggesting that understanding the situation in Hong Kong requires moving beyond simplistic dualities of 'right versus wrong' or 'winner versus loser'. This statement rejects dominant media narratives which aim for clear-cut conclusions and instead insists on a more nuanced understanding.

The following series of questions (i.e., What makes people on the streets…standoff between the Chinese government and the Hong Kong people) invoke a discursive strategy emphasising the importance of addressing root causes of the protests rather than just surface-level symptoms. These interrogatives position the reader as a reflective participant, prompting deeper contemplation on systemic issues and the underlying motivations of the protesters. The phrase 'Bare hands people (relatively) can never beat the armed government' alludes to the stark power disparity between individual protesters and an institutionalised power structure. This metaphorical representation serves to underline the vulnerability and bravery of the protesters while simultaneously emphasising the immense power held by the governing bodies. Lastly, the concluding remark 'that is why the government should be humbled and listen to the

people', serves as a normative claim, asserting the moral responsibility of those in power. By invoking the notion of humility, the discourse shifts the traditional narrative of power, suggesting that true strength lies in dialogue, empathy and responsiveness rather than sheer force or authority.

However, this is one of the few perspectives that seek to address the issues of the protests *per se*, rather than taking sides either of the government or the protestors. As previously stated, the majority of Chinese netizens expressed their nationalistic vigour to support the Chinese government/the CCP (see 5.2.2), and some netizens in Hong Kong/outside China also expressed the statement such as Hong Kong should be independent, which suggested the identity conflicts between Hong Kongers and Chinese. Nevertheless, compared to the CCP was represented as an *armed government*, the protestors were represented as *bare hands people*, hence indicating the latter was weak, and their failure seems inevitable.

Theme 2. Attitudes toward the Protests

The researcher observed that some Facebook discourses were focused on questioning the legitimacy of the protests. It is interesting to see posts discussing whether the protests were legitimate or not. Below is a Facebook post which indicated attitudes against the protests:

> (15). The protests have changed *from peace to violence* and will *continue to escalate* without any sign of stopping. The protests have *seriously disrupted* our everyday life and have *damaged* Hong Kong's status as an international financial harbour. I urge you all to stop (my emphasis).

From this post, it is indicated that although some people understood that the protests were peaceful in the early stage, they still criticised the severe consequences of the protests. For instance, the initial sentence, 'The protests have changed…without any sign of stopping' establishes a transformation narrative. This temporal sequencing from 'peace' to 'violence' serves as a discursive strategy to underline the deviation from the original character of the protests, suggesting an escalation beyond intended or anticipated boundaries. The term 'violence' corresponded to the Chinese side's narrative of the protests as 'riots', and the deterministic language 'will continue to escalate' indicates a perceived inevitability, painting a bleak picture of the situation's trajectory.

Following this, the statement ‘The protests have seriously disrupted our everyday life…as an international financial harbour’, offers a socio-economic perspective to the discourse. The usage of ‘our everyday life’ reflects a collective identity, emphasising the shared impact of the protests on the general populace. Furthermore, the reference to Hong Kong’s status as a financial hub implies economic repercussions and an international dimension to the consequences, suggesting that the disruptions might be affecting Hong Kong’s global image and standing.

The final sentence ‘I urge you all to stop’ culminates in a direct appeal, signifying a desire for restoration and stability. The term ‘urge’ expresses a sense of desperation and concern. At the same time, the word ‘stop’ also suggests the speaker’s hope to return to normal, and his/her negative emotion and feeling about the protests, hence delegitimising the protests/protestors. Concurrently, another post provides a counterargument to the above post and legitimises the protests as follows:

> (16). I hope you accept and understand that this *short-term* instability and chaos is dedicated to Hong Kong society’s *long-term* stability and healthy development. The protests are not only for us, but more importantly, they aim to provide the next generation with a *democratic and freedom atmosphere* (my emphasis).

Compared to the above post, this post legitimises the protests such as using ‘short-term’ and ‘long-term’ as antonyms to indicate the importance of protests (i.e., democratic and freedom atmosphere), although in the short term, there would be instability and may affect ordinary people’s daily life. The phrases ‘short-term instability and chaos’ and ‘long-term stability and healthy development’ were in stark contrast in the post and became two main narratives in terms of legitimacy of the protests.

The third post seems to be a Chinese netizen, who expressed partial understanding of the protests as below:

> (17). I believe that what the people of Hong Kong *demand is reasonable*. This is a very *serious process*, and it does need *oversight by the people*, but as a mainlander I do support the extradition bill because there are a lot of mainland officials that escape to Hong Kong for political asylum (my emphasis).

On the one hand, the netizen feels that the demand of the protestors is reasonable while on the other hand, supports the extradition bill with rationale (i.e., Chinese officials for political asylum in Hong Kong). By juxtaposing these opinions, it indicated

although some Chinese people depicting the protest from the positive perspective (i.e., demand is reasonable), the manipulation of information by the CCP caused the majority of Chinese netizens negatively represent the protests and delegitimise the protestors by neglecting the perspective and discourse from the Hong Kong side.

To sum up, this theme highlights netizens' attitudes on whether support or against the protests. Those supporting the protests are mostly identified with Hong Kongers/the West, while people against the protests lean to support the Chinese government's actions. Studies have found individuals prefer to be part of a group that has a privileged position in society, instead of belonging to a socially disadvantaged one (Tajfel and Turner, 2004: Saleem et al., 2019; Scheepers and Ellemers, 2019). In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the protests and clearly elaborate the theme, the researcher further collected netizens online comments, and compared those who support the protests with those against the protests. The comments are examined by looking at how the targeted social group (i.e., the Hong Konger and Chinese people) represented the protests from their own perspectives.

Through the use of 'negative other' strategy, the two camps represented the protests in a distinctive way. Negative attributions are commonly used especially concerning judgments on intent, hostility, and blame regarding other behaviours during the protests. The popular term used by the supporters expressed their frustrations for the Chinese people, is *failure to fight for their freedom*. The word *freedom* appears frequently from the supporters of protests, and negatively associate with Chinese people. The Chinese people are portrayed as those who do not focus on freedom, or just see freedom is taboo in China. For example:

> (18). D*** those Chinese people who *do not fight for freedom* on their own but *just enjoy freedom in other countries*. All they care about is food, but do they ever consider if they could have food without a good government? (my emphasis)

And

> (19). What the mainlanders need to *get rid of* is their *submissiveness and servility*. Yes, you can choose not to change, but it does not mean that Hong Kong people do not. Although the economy has dramatically improved in China, *freedom is still taboo*. (my emphasis)

The posts above depict the Chinese populace as exhibiting traits of passivity and compliance, casting them in an unfavourable light due to the associated implications of subordination (i.e., submissiveness and servility). A recurring theme is the perceived unwillingness of the Chinese to champion the cause of freedom. The discursive strategy of foregrounding, which accentuates certain concepts to capture readers' attention (Huckin, 1997), is evident in the remarks about the Chinese people's reluctance to advocate for freedom and their resistance to change. By making these aspects salient, the strategy offers readers a redefined perspective. Moreover, the comments employ strongly worded expressions to underscore the perceived shortcomings of the Chinese stance. Through accentuating their moral high ground and showing their superiority, the Hong Kongers emphasise that the protests are legitimate, instead of what the Chinese side represented the protests as 'riots'.

On the other hand, people who are against the protests portrayed the pro-democracy movement with cautionary slangs. One netizen says:

> (20). Do these Hong Kong *youngsters* understand that revolutions always bleed? These *naive guys* do not have any social experience but just feel that what they are doing is significant and justified. In fact, they do not even know what they really want (my emphasis).

This is supported by another netizen:

> (21). These *young people* do not have the national spirit and national pride but pursue the hollowed 'democracy and freedom'. From my viewpoint, they will definitely be *manipulated by Western foreign forces*. Why do they not have any national spirits? And how would they fight for freedom and democracy without the country's prosperity? (my emphasis)

Here, the basic argument is that from the Chinese people's perspective, the protesters are a group of *young* and *naïve* people who pursued the hollowed notions of freedom and democracy at any cost without considering social stability and economic development, which are the perspectives that many Chinese people are concerned about than democracy and freedom. As Shi and Lu (2010) state, Chinese people tend to voice their concerns to political leaders instead of participating in aggressive political movements. At the same time, a great number of Chinese people have realised that China must develop democracy with its own characteristics, which is a paternalistic

notion of government that denies political competition (Shi, 2008) instead of completely adopting Western-style democracy (Barme, 1995; Liu and Chen, 2012; He, 2013). By pointing out that the protesters are not mature enough and more likely manipulated by Western foreign forces, these discourses express and indicate the Chinese people's patriotism/nationalism, the same as those discourses on Chinese social media (see 5.2).

In the two texts, the discursive labelling strategy has been used, which involves assigning negative traits by labelling the outgroup with adjectives, and stereotyping the outgroup with nouns (Flowerdew, 2012). Labelling the protestors as young belittles them as a group of people who are easy to control and do not know what they want. In the traditional Chinese culture, young people imply inexperience and need to be taught by elders. Therefore, by labelling the protestors, Chinese netizens are also labelling themselves as elders, implying that Hong Kong should listen to China's arrangements. Additionally, nominalisation is used in the two contexts. Instead of using verbs to describe the protestors, the netizens use noun structures that describe them through abstraction or generalisation - labelling them without real engagement or critical scrutiny rather than detailed explanations. Nominalisation may narrow audiences' thinking and vision, and to some extent, it is the absence of vocabulary where some ideologies are presupposed. For example, the netizens presupposed that the protestors were young and naive, who only tried to pursue the so-called 'freedom and democracy' without considering the nation's spirits. In this case, they were labelled without critical scrutiny. However, the strategies promote specific interests and perpetuate negative ideological portrayals of the Other.

Theme 3. Actions of the police

After the police fired tear gas on the protestors, there were overwhelming critical voices of the police action on Facebook. For example, the following post criticised the police:

> (22). Let us see what the Hong Kong police do - they crackdown on these unarmed protestors! Oh my god, *do they really realise what they are doing*? (my emphasis)

On the other hand, some netizens expressed some extent of support of the police action, such as below:

> (23). Like all of you, I was *shocked* at first. I trust that the majority of protesters were peaceful. However, I saw myself that several protesters insulting the police

with nasty words, and they were even trying to attack the police with iron sticks and cudgels (my emphasis).

In these narratives, two netizens generally expressed negatively feeling (i.e., shocked) in terms of the police response to the unarmed protestors, although the latter one justified the police self-defence action of firing tear gas according to his/her personal experience. It indicated that compared to the Chinese side, which negatively represented the protests, most Hong Kongers tended to support the protests by mentioning their understanding of the importance of the protests, although some of them did not fully support the police actions toward the protestors, and vice versa.

Theme 4. The CCP

The CCP is a normal but inevitable theme when discussing protests in Hong Kong (i.e., the 2014 Umbrella Movement). Some netizens expressed fear when discussing the CCP and indicated that the CCP's direct rule would bring havoc and chaos to Hong Kong. For instance, one post states below:

(24). China's yesterday is Hong Kong's today, and Hong Kong will *undertake huge havoc and chaos* if we yielded to the CCP's rule (my emphasis).

This post's argument is based on the perception that in history, China was experiencing havoc and chaos (e.g., Cultural Revolution, The Great Leap Forward and Three Years' Great Famine) due to the CCP's rule. Hence, if the CCP would directly rule Hong Kong, the same would happen to Hong Kong as well.

Others drew on the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre as an example to illustrate how violent the CCP is in history, hence suggesting how the CCP would deal with the 2019 Hong Kong protests:

(25). Considering what the CCP did in *8964* (abbreviation of the Tiananmen Square massacre), it is no doubt that the communist party would brutally suppress the Hong Kong protests as well (my emphasis).

The term '8964' in the above post suggests that the CCP's blood dealt with the Tiananmen Square protests on 4th June 1989. After that, some protest leaders/organisers escaped to Hong Kong or other countries, such as the US, for political asylum (Tsui and Pang, 2014). From then on, Hong Kong people gathered

every year on 4th June for the vigil of people sacrificed in the Tiananmen Square massacre. On the other hand, public talking about the incident has been strictly prohibited in China (Iyengar, 2015). According to this post, given the situation that in the past, the CCP harshly suppressed the protests, thus, it is predictable that the CCP would do the same to the 2019 Hong Kong protests. Concurrently, another post indicated some Hong Kongers' resolve to inherit willpower (i.e., strive for democracy and freedom) from those who lost their lives in the Tiananmen Square massacre:

> (26). As a new generation of Hong Kong, we shall never forget those people who lost their lives during the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, and we endeavour to *deliver their willpower* to more people around us (my emphasis).

The above post evokes sentiments of young Hong Kongers by recalling the memory of lost lives seeking democracy and freedom in China thirty years ago. It suggests that the sacrifice in Tiananmen Square has not been in vain, and the youth of Hong Kong would like to be the successor to the Tiananmen Square protestors. The post uses juxtaposition where the current pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong are compared to the Tiananmen Square protests, which carves the identity of the Hong Kong protestors in alignment with the identity of the Tiananmen Square protestors. Such discourse sought to solidify the legitimacy of the protests and encourage other protestors, hence maintaining solidarity.

Besides juxtaposing the protests with the Tiananmen Square massacre, some posts stated the negative emotion of the CCP's action on Hong Kong, hence legitimised the protests:

> The Chinese Communist Party has been *systematically eroding the basic freedoms* they promised to the people of Hong Kong. Those responsible *must be held accountable*. *Today's action* is another important signal to the world that we *must stand with Hong Kong* (my emphasis).

The post implies that the CCP's attempts to compromise and erode the freedom of Hong Kong.

Starting with lexical choices, the term 'systematically eroding' is notably poignant. The adverb 'systematically' positions the CCP's actions as deliberate, not randomly or passively. Furthermore, by gradually eroding Hong Kong's freedoms, the CCP tries to change the political system in Hong Kong to the same as China. Hence, the term

eroding is used foregrounding to signify the seriousness of the CCP's actions in taking away the freedom of Hong Kongers. The notion of the 'basic freedoms they promised' serves a dual purpose: it reminds readers of the commitments made by the CCP and simultaneously suggests a breach of trust, painting the Party as untrustworthy.

Discursively, the text employs an 'Us vs Them' dichotomy. This binary opposition is evident with phrases like 'we must stand with Hong Kong', subtly distinguishing between those who support Hong Kong's freedoms and those undermining them (i.e., the CCP). The emphasis on accountability, 'Those responsible must be held accountable', not only underscores a call for justice but also projects a moral imperative. Furthermore, modality plays a pivotal role in the statement. Modal verbs especially 'must' in 'must be held accountable' and 'we must stand', indicate a sense of urgency and moral responsibility. Such a modality reinforces the message that action supporting Hong Kong is not just necessary but morally mandated. Lastly, the phrase 'Today's action' suggests a proactive stance, implying that measures have been or are being taken in response to the CCP's actions. The post alarms the world regarding what is happening in Hong Kong and calls the West to stand with Hong Kong as the protests strive for democracy and freedom. By stressing the moral and urgent need for global solidarity, the post indirectly legitimates the protests and protestors in Hong Kong.

6.4 Findings and Discussion

As previously stated, social media platforms have become places where the general public can engage in discussion about a series of public issues (see 5.1). In the context of the 2019 Hong Kong protests, Western social media discourses have challenged the CCP's rhetoric and propaganda. By using social media, Hong Kongers mobilise more people to support the protests, especially from the international community (i.e., there are some groups in the U.S. that went to the streets to show their support for the Hong Kong protests). The obtained data shows the catalytic features of social media on civil disobedience and participation, and how digital activism is conceptualised in terms of organised mobilisation and challenge of dominant ideologies.

Social media narratives of the protests on Twitter concentrate on the hashtags such as #HongKongProtests, #AntiELAB and #FreedomHK, which indicate how severe this social movement is and what it causes to the whole society in Hong Kong. Through

analysing relevant tweets, the researcher identified two salient themes; one focuses on the positive representation of Hong Kongers' identity, and another emphasises how the government and police's actions towards the protest/protestors are negatively represented. In terms of the first theme, by using different discursive strategies, the protestors' narrative intensifies the severe and urgent situation of the protests and represents themselves as a group of people who have true loyalty to this land (i.e., Hong Kong) by illustrating their unending resolve of protecting Hong Kong's democracy and freedom, and fight for this until the last minute and with any cost, hence legitimising the protests. This theme also exposed that the protests have caused more serious and conflictual identity divisions (i.e., yellow camp vs blue camp) due to different political affiliations within Hong Kong, thus casting a shadow of the protests.

The second theme focuses on negatively representing the government and the police's actions toward the protests/protestors. On the one hand, although the then-CE Carrie Lam casts herself as the 'mother' of Hong Kong, the researcher finds that she actually is an iron-hearted person after reading and analysing tweets from the protesters, which rebuts her hypocritical image and indirectly de-legitimised the SAR government's action. On the other hand, by intensifying the police's brutal actions (i.e., shot to journalists) and indicating their indifferences to the victims (i.e., still reject to apologies), these narratives from the protestors vividly represented compared to previous social movements, how violent the police were towards the protestors during the 2019 Hong Kong protests by engaging the victim (i.e., the protestors) and aggressor (i.e., the police) category pairing (Bhatia and Ross, 2022), hence the protestors legitimate their action and de-legitimate actions both from the SAR government and the police. Against the backdrop, according to Bhatia and Ross (2022: 137), certainly not limited to Twitter, but the whole social media has become a 'primary means for protesters to proliferate their conceptualisation of the event and issues plaguing Hong Kong's socio-political landscape'.

While on the Facebook platform, the analysis indicated when netizens talk about the protests, their response to the protests shows slightly different. Although the majority of people support the protests, there is a small group of people who indicate against their attitudes. Besides, these discourses were illustrated with salient characteristics which emphasise universal values such as freedom and democracy but also showed some close links between Hong Kong and China (i.e., political and economic reliance on China). Against this backdrop, discursive themes on Facebook firstly considered

the relationship between Hong Kong and China due to the protests may cause serious affection between the two regions in the future and even challenge the rule of the CCP.

Additionally, although the CCP has never ruled Hong Kong directly, some netizens still expressed fearful emotions of the CCP when discussing the 2019 Hong Kong protests on social media. This may be partly explained by the CCP's violent repression of the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests on the one hand, and the CCP's similar actions in Chinese history (i.e., Cultural Revolution, The Great Leap Forward, Three years' Great Famine, etc.), which led to Hong Kong people's instinct fear of the CCP on the other hand. Against this backdrop, although Hong Kongers and the Chinese people shared a similar language and with the same ethnic root and culture, the two sides (i.e., Hong Kong and China) illustrated strikingly different representations of the protests, and these representations further reflected the socio-political tensions and their increased divisions between Hong Kong and China. Hence, they got different conclusions of the same issue.

In terms of the protests, compared to the Chinese state media and social media discourses which dominated nationalistic and paternalistic cliches and emphasised Hong Kong should be collaborative and yield to China's rule (Kou et al., 2017), discourses from Hong Kongers on Western social media platforms (i.e., Facebook and Twitter) indicated their undaunting resolve to strive for democracy and freedom. For example, when discussing their attitudes toward the protests, Hong Kongers tend to provide more actual evidence to support their claim on social media platforms (i.e., for long-term stability and healthy development). At the same time, Chinese netizens on social media are more likely to make stereotyped narratives of the protests based on their limited information and knowledge of Hong Kong. For instance, they focused on discussing Hong Kong's intertwined history with the West (i.e., Britain), emphasising Hong Kong and China's declining relationship since Hong Kong's handover in 1997 and recent tensions between the two sides instead of investigating the 'real face' of the protests. According to Kou et al. (2017), Hong Kong people and the Chinese people illustrated starkly different representations even if they discussed the same protests. On the other hand, by stressing the importance of national sovereignty and territorial integrity, the Chinese people/the CCP always attributed China's internal crisis to the hostile Western interference, no matter whether they had obvious evidence or not. In doing so, the Chinese media discourses effectively constructed a legitimised Self (i.e.,

the Chinese government/the CCP) and delegitimised Other (i.e., the protests/protestors) in terms of the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

To sum up, how people view and represent a political event (i.e., the 2019 Hong Kong protests) largely depends on their social and political systems. Although Hong Kongers and the Chinese people belong to the same country, speak the similar language, and discuss the same protests, they 'remained largely separated and developed vastly different discourses, with little communication observed' (Kou et al., 2017: 830). This might be partly explained by the echo chamber effect, which suggests that people are willing to talk with like-minded others, reinforcing or amplifying their shared beliefs and opinions (Jamieson and Cappella, 2008; Key and Cummings, 1966). On the other hand, social media algorithms might enhance this situation by providing what users enjoy reading (McNeal, 2014; Nunez, 2016). This thesis gets a similar result but from the discourse perspective, which suggests that people might reinforce the Self side's (i.e., China) narrative/representation of the protests and make it harder for others (i.e., Hong Kong) to understand (Kou, et al., 2017). For instance, without essential knowledge of China's social and political systems and an understanding of its ideology, it may be difficult for Hong Kong people joining the Chinese social media platforms to discuss the protests, and vice versa (i.e., for Chinese people participating in Facebook/Twitter discussions of the same issue) (ibid).

Given that many Chinese people did not participate in the protests, it is undoubted that their subjective comments on Chinese social media platforms focus on criticising the protestors instead of investigating the 'real' fact, thus showing solidarity and sympathy for the protests. However, this may cause by several reasons, such as (1). the CCP/the Chinese state media's brainwashing and propaganda of the protests; (2). different ideologies between Hong Kong and Chinese people; (3). Hong Kong and China's declining relationship since the handover in 1997; and (4). Chinese people do not have real experience of the protests, so it is difficult for them to have the same feeling as Hong Kongers and develop sympathy and understanding (Kou et al., 2017).

6.5 Conclusion

Through thoroughly examining discourses on two prominent Western social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, this chapter indicates that distinct themes have emerged in these platforms compared to Chinese social media platforms (i.e., Weibo

and WeChat). Foremost among the findings is a clear contrast between the primarily negative representation of the 2019 Hong Kong protests on Chinese social media and the largely supportive stance evident on Western platforms. This divergence can be partially attributed to the echo chamber effect (see 6.3). Rooted in the propensity of individuals to engage primarily with like-minded peers, this effect intensifies shared beliefs and perspectives. Additionally with this, contemporary social media algorithms, which are designed to present users with content tailored to their preferences, inadvertently reinforce existing biases. Yet, it is also worth considering the role of information dissemination in China. Given the widespread state censorship and the CCP's propagandist approaches, Chinese netizens may lack a holistic understanding of the protests. Despite this, the democratising potential of social media has empowered ordinary citizens to challenge and reinterpret official narratives.

Notwithstanding the dominant supportive discourse on Facebook and Twitter, it is essential to recognise the presence of dissenting voices. Some users have questioned the protests' legitimacy, articulating concerns about how pursuing democratic ideals might disrupt their daily life. Additionally, the spectre of past CCP transgressions, notably the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, haunts a segment of the discourse. These users convey apprehensions about the CCP exerting direct control over Hong Kong, potentially undermining the autonomy of the SAR government. Thus, different speculations intertwined regarding the future trajectory of China and Hong Kong relations in the protests' aftermath.

To sum up, while the momentum of support for the protests is undeniable on Western social media platforms, the discourse remains multifaceted, reflecting many concerns and interpretations about the ongoing events and their broader implications. In light of the broader scope of this thesis, which scrutinises representations and discourses on various social media platforms (i.e., China and the West), the conclusion drawn from examining Western social media platforms provides crucial insights. The robust support for the protests underscored in Western platforms is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a larger global narrative and understanding of the protests in Hong Kong. This perspective is shaped by and, in turn, shapes the dynamic discourse of international politics, human rights and freedom of expression. Furthermore, the diverse range of voices, even within the dominant narrative of support on Western social media platforms, underscores the importance of considering multiple perspectives in any comprehensive study. It reminds the researcher that some

nuances and subtleties deserve attention even within the apparent consensus. Hence, this complexity will be pivotal in ensuring a balanced and holistic analysis in the upcoming times.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

7.1 Thesis Overview

Starting from a part of imperial China to a colony under Britain's rule for more than 150 years, then handover to China in 1997, Hong Kong's sovereignty has changed several times. This change has impacted the city economically, culturally, and politically, creating significant differences from China. Following Western ideologies and legal systems, Hong Kong has been driven towards capitalism and pursuing freedom and democracy. While China, under the CCP's rule since its foundation in 1949, is still keeping its authoritarian and communist system. The system and ideological differences inevitably led to identity conflict between the two sides. In addition, since the handover, Hong Kongers' resentment of the CCP's more direct intervention in Hong Kong's internal political issues, e.g., universal suffrage, and the CCP's planned erosion of Hong Kong's high autonomous status was growing. All the factors mentioned above finally caused the most severe protests in Hong Kong's history, i.e., the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

Overall, the structure of this thesis tries to bring together levels of texts from Chinese and Hong Kong/Western media platforms and the intricate sociopolitical contexts within China and Hong Kong, to account for processes of production, distribution and consumption of language use (e.g., discourse) vis-à-vis the 2019 Hong Kong protests. To use KhosraviNik's (2015) words, discourse production and interpretation are essential in answering questions such as who says what (to whom), why they draw on specific themes and discursive strategies, and how readers/netizens may interpret them. In addition, the explanations of the socio-political context in China and Hong Kong provide an overview of the existing body of shared knowledge, which is drawn upon in the interpretation and production process of discourse (KhosraviNik, 2015: 264). Amid this background, the discourse surrounding the 2019 Hong Kong protests is indispensably positioned as part of broader relations between China and Hong Kong/the West, and vice versa. Specifically from the Chinese side, the CCP constructs a virtuous, righteous Self (i.e., China/the CCP) and an evil, hostile Other (i.e., Hong Kong protestors/the West) through the ubiquitous nationalist propaganda and subtly applying diversified discursive strategies, e.g., nomination, intensification, and mitigation in state and social media discourse (for more details, please see Chapters

4 and 5), effectively transferred the public eyes and internal contradictions, e.g., legitimacy of the CCP.

As mentioned previously, the relationship between ideology, power, and identity and how these factors are evolved and represented through discourse have been well acknowledged in CDA, an interdisciplinary and eclectic research approach (for more details, please see 3.1 - 3.3). Given this, the research applies CDA as both a theoretical and methodological approach to investigate China and Hong Kong/Western media discourse of the 2019 Hong Kong protests, to mainly elucidate how the protests related to broader issues in China, e.g., identity and legitimacy, instead of focusing on the protests *per se,* or a balanced comparison between China and Hong Kong's representation of the protests (for more details, please see Chapter 1). Thus, the data I collected and analysed in this thesis (for more details, please see 3.6) focused more on the Chinese side, e.g., Chinese state media and social media discourses. However, I also selected and analysed data from one Hong Kong media, i.e., SCMP, and two Western mainstream social media, i.e., Twitter (now X) and Facebook, to maintain a holistic analysis but these are less important than the thesis's primary research aim and focus, i.e., China/the CCP's self-representation of the protests.

Through a detailed discursive analysis, I uncovered that the nature of the 2019 Hong Kong protests was an entrenched ideological conflict between people from Hong Kong and China. That is, instead of just being against the extradition bill, the protests represented an undaunting resistance of Hong Kongers when facing the hegemonic domination of the CCP, which aims to gradually erode Hong Kong's high autonomous status and freedom promised by the Sino-British Joint Declaration. However, by incorporating ideologies and manipulating the Chinese state and social media, the CCP suppressed those marginalised voices that expressed their supportive claim towards the protestors, hence legitimising Self and delegitimised Others' counter-narrative of the protests (for more details, please see Chapters 4 and 5). Meanwhile, discourses from Western social media indicate that the majority of netizens generally supported the protests and protestors' resistance against the CCP's authority of rule in Hong Kong. However, a small number of people also questioned the legitimacy of the protests, as the protests had affected their daily lives to some extent (for more details, please see Chapter 6).

7.2 Summary of the Main Findings

When the protests gained momentum in the second half of 2019, Chinese state media discourse of the protests was strongly negative and critical (for more details, please see Chapter 4). Specifically, considering China's past humiliated history (for more details, please see Chapter 2), sovereignty and territorial integrity became extremely sensitive topics when an external crisis, such as the 2019 Hong Kong protests, occurred. Given this, state media applied different discursive strategies, maintaining that the protests were a conspiracy caused by foreign hostile forces, e.g., the USA and the UK, trying to interfere in China's internal affairs, hence instigating nationalist sentiments among the public to legitimise the CCP's condescending attitudes and suppressive actions towards the protestors, also delegitimise Other's counter-narrative.

In the meantime, by expressing seemingly patriotic yet essentially nationalistic sentiments, Chinese social media netizens strongly approved of the CCP's carefully orchestrated narrative regarding the protests. It is argued that social media shifts from traditional mass media's centralised communication to participatory communication, potentially providing more decentralised and democratised access to discursive power (KhosraviNik, 2018; also see 3.5 for more details). However, the CCP's unprecedented and pervasive censorship of social media has increased nationalism (Fang and Repnikova; also see 2.3.7 for more details). This means the more censored, the more nationalistic sentiments netizens express. Data from popular Chinese social media platforms like Weibo and WeChat supports this thesis (for more details, please see Chapter 5).

Additionally, by emphasising the emotional connection between Hong Kong and China and the importance of maintaining China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Chinese netizens reached a consensus that handling the 2019 Hong Kong protests is an internal Chinese affair rather than an international issue. Data from Chinese social media also suggests that, although netizens acknowledge the implementation of the *One Country, Two Systems* (OCTS) policy in Hong Kong, they strongly agree that *One Country* must take precedence over *Two Systems* due to their sense of national identity.

However, discourses from Western social media platforms like Twitter (now X) and Facebook suggested that the CCP's efforts to retain Chinese national identity and legitimise its rule were challenged during the protests. Most posts and comments from

these platforms supported the protestors and portrayed the social movement positively. These narratives challenged the CCP's authority in Hong Kong, despite its actual control over the region. Additionally, these discourses highlighted the growing development of Hong Konger identities, with many Hong Kong people viewing themselves as more Westernised and sophisticated compared to mainland Chinese (for more details, please see 2.4 for more details). In other words, public awareness and support for Hong Kong as an independent and unique area distinct from China are increasing.

To sum up, the 2019 protests can be seen as Hong Kongers' long-standing resentment towards the CCP's systematically eroded autonomy and freedom and an indirect challenge to the CCP's ruling in the region. However, the nature of the protests is an ideological conflict between China and Hong Kong. On the one hand, through adopting all-round state media control and social censorship, the CCP effectively made all Chinese people speak the same tone; that is, the so-called foreign hostile forces manipulated the protests and would damage China's sovereignty and territory integrity, hence uniting people's minds and gaining public sustain towards the party's suppressive actions in the following steps. On the other hand, from Hong Kong and Western perspective, although a small group of people expressed their doubt and complaints about the protests, a significant number of people showed their support towards the unprecedented social movements in Hong Kong's history, indicating their unwavering pursuit of freedom and democracy and supporting Hong Kongers' identity. Nevertheless, the sudden passage and implementation of the Hong Kong National Security Law made all this pointless. The following section will discuss the impact of the National Security Law on Hong Kong.

7.3 The profound impact of the National Security Law (NSL)

As mentioned in previous chapters (for more details, please see 2.4), China promised to maintain Hong Kong's freedom and high autonomy status for fifty years under the 'One Country, Two Systems' (hereafter OCTS) policy. However, on 30th June 2020, Beijing introduced a wide-ranging National Security Law (hereafter NSL) for Hong Kong. The NSL provides unrestricted power of the CCP, makes it easier to prosecute dissidents, and further erodes Hong Kong's freedom and autonomy in the name of so-called national security, hence bringing unrest and casting a shadow over Hong Kong's prosperous development in the future (Hung, 2022).

The new NSL addresses crimes such as secession, subversion, terrorism, and collusion with foreign powers, which should be judged under Hong Kong's independent judiciary and law system, as the Basic Law regulated that the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (hereafter HKSAR) government could pass its legislation regarding these offences (The Economist, 2020). However, the eruption of the 2019 Hong Kong protests finally caused China to lose patience. Hence, it (i.e., China) not only bluntly defined the protests as an unsuccessful 'colour revolution' (China Daily, 2019) but also claimed that it would implement the NSL to further protect Hong Kong's prosperity and stability in May 2020. In short, the law indicates that the CCP would have more direct interference in Hong Kong's internal affairs and would have swung away all democracy and freedom in the region.

According to the NSL, all activists in the future could face much more severe charges, i.e., they may face the maximum of life in prison penalties, if they engage in activities similar to the 2019 Hong Kong protests (The Economist, 2020). Although Chinese officials mentioned that the law might not be applied retroactively, i.e., the law would not affect actions taken before the implementation of the NSL on 30th June 2020, and claimed that the law would only focus on an extremely small group of people, the law is still beyond most Hong Kongers' expectations and imagination (Amnesty International, 2020).

The implementation of the NSL not only makes a large number of young activists at the forefront of the 2019 Hong Kong protests worry, e.g., the famous social activist Joshua Wong disbanded his party Demosisto just before the NSL was passed, but also affects a wide range of peaceful activists, who need to consider the outcome before their action (The Economist, 2020). On the other hand, the law calls for more rigorous regulation and supervision of education, social organisations, the media and the internet, thus affecting other aspects of freedom and democracy in Hong Kong (Human Rights Watch, 2021). After the implementation of the NSL in 2020, the chilling effect has begun to emerge gradually in Hong Kong. For instance, despite thousands of Hong Kong people still gathering and protesting on 1st July 2020, the number of demonstrators was far smaller than before. However, the police still arrested 370 participants and accused at least ten people of violating the new NSL after the protests (SCMP, 2020).

To sum up, since the implementation of the NSL, Hong Kong's suffering has sounded an alarm worldwide. The notorious NSL has proven that the CCP cannot be trusted, despite its commitment to maintaining Hong Kong's high autonomy status for fifty years under the OCTS policy. Additionally, the CCP continues to suppress and surveil dissidents, both in Hong Kong and globally, mirroring its actions in mainland China. Against this backdrop, the world must unite and remain vigilant against China's rise, especially given its increasingly apparent intentions to invade Taiwan by force.

7.4 Contributions and Implications

This study's contribution can be envisaged from various perspectives. First, the study aspires to introduce new perspectives on the representation of the Hong Kong protests, especially from a non-Western viewpoint. As the most significant and large-scale social movement in Hong Kong's history, the 2019 Hong Kong protests have garnered extensive attention both from China and Hong Kong, as well as worldwide (i.e., the West). Current literature predominantly concentrates on how the demonstrations have been portrayed in Hong Kong/Western traditional media (e.g., newspapers; see Lee et al., 2020; Liu and Ma, 2022; Wang, 2022) and on Western digital/social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Reddit; see Dynel and Poppi, 2021; Bhatia and Ross, 2022; Fang, 2023). Yet, there is little scholarly work focusing on perspectives from non-Western/democratic but authoritarian contexts, such as China. In particular, considering the intertwined historical relations between China and Hong Kong, analysing China/the CCP's self-representation of the protests inherently involved a Chinese perspective on self-legitimacy and identity. To fill this gap, through detailed discursive analyses of selected texts from Chinese state media (e.g., People's Daily, PD and China Daily, CD) and social media (e.g., Weibo and WeChat), this research not only elaborates on the CCP's narratives of the protests but also reveals how the protests further connected to other broader issues in China.

Second, the research enhances the current understanding of the intricate Chinese sociopolitical context, including perception of national identity and arguments for legitimacy of the CCP. The issue of legitimacy has been discussed widely because it has 'always been contested and often rejected explicitly by significant portions of China's population' (Fang, 2022: 75). The consensus is that, as an authoritarian regime, the CCP's legitimacy does not derive from fair elections and ballots like most Western counterparts. Instead, it mainly depends on a). economic growth; and b). nationalism (for more details, please see 2.2.4 - 2.2.6). Although the reform and opening-up policy

brings China forty years of high-speed economic development, the growth has recently slowed down. Hence, the CCP has increasingly sought the latter axis of legitimation, i.e., nationalism, to maintain power and its rule. One of the contributions of the thesis is to show how such discourse is constructed, distributed and consumed in contemporary China. It provides details of such ideological discourse and the shift by doing empirical analysis of texts and talks in China (see 4.6 and 5.5). In other words, on the one hand, rapid economic growth affords the regime some level of people's satisfaction and approval to conceal inner contradictions, e.g., officials' corruption and unbalanced regional development and on the other hand, the party increasingly relies on nationalist propaganda to unite minds and gain legitimacy through popular support among the public, especially when an external crisis occurs (or constructed), e.g., the 2019 Hong Kong protests.

Third, this thesis makes an important contribution towards our understanding of the Chinese state media apparatus. Existing literature mentions that the primary role of Chinese state media is to serve the CCP and propagate its ideology to the domestic audience instead of truth and objective journalism (Tong, 2010). However, this is not often substantiated with details of specific analysis of real data, i.e., discursive materials. The thesis presents a nuanced analysis of actual discourses (for more details, please see Chapter 4) in the way media systems work at the service of authoritarian ideology in China. Chinese state media not only focused on coverage of the protests' 'violent' confrontations as a means to de-legitimate the demands but also tried to create an external enemy (i.e., the West) interfering in Chinese internal affairs, i.e., through instigating nationalist sentiment. In the meantime, as the so-called Western hostile forces plotted the protests, the CCP legitimised its suppressive actions toward the demonstrations in the name of state sovereignty and territorial integrity (for more details, please see 4.3.1).

Fourth, this thesis broadens the current knowledge of Chinese social media and its influence on the public sphere. Although social media has been broadly utilised in China, the Great Firewall (henceforth GFW) prevents Chinese netizens from browsing prominent Western social media, e.g., Facebook, Twitter (now X), and YouTube, without a Virtual Private Network (henceforth VPN). Instead, they mainly depend on Weibo and WeChat to engage in social media communications in China. In the meantime, social media's participatory and interactive nature makes absolute control of its resources impossible (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2016). Thus, as a new

communicative paradigm, social media would facilitate democratised bottom-up discourse formation (KhosraviNik, 2018: 583) and afford new spaces of citizenry power (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2016: 206). Nevertheless, this research only partially supports the democratisation thesis for social media (for more details, please see Chapter 5). It is a fact that compared to the state media's commanding, top-down propaganda modes, social media's participatory, bottom-up communication features may have allowed a certain degree of genuine expression and democratic formation in China's rigid sociopolitical context. However, the CCP adopted all-encompassing and ubiquitous censorship and surveillance of information, making social media in China more or less an extension of the state media. For instance, discourses of the 2019 Hong Kong protests on Chinese state media and social media are highly homogeneous, i.e., both highlighting and condemning Western 'black hands' interfering in Chinese internal affairs to incite nationalist sentiments. This unexpected finding corresponds to Repnikova and Fang's (2018) claims, asserting that due to the CCP's massive digital revamping of state media in recent years, Chinese netizens have gradually become collaborative and complicit with the regime without realising it.

Fifth, this study effectively contributes to the application of Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) in diverse i.e., non-Western contexts. As an interdisciplinary approach to language in use (please see Chapter 3 for an overview of CDA developments, approaches and change). One of the key issues here is that CDA has traditionally stemmed from and been applied to 'Western' (democratic, capitalist, late modern) sociopolitical contexts where the adoption of CDA within non-Western contexts remains limited. This calls for a specific focus on processes of adoption and adaption of various principles and methodologies when dealing with a non-Western, (authoritarian, communist) context like China. However, one of the aims of this study has been to acknowledge and delineate such contextual diversities in utilising CDA as a theoretical and methodological approach to analyse Chinese media discourses (i.e., texts).

Finally, and following on the above, this research contributes to a nuanced understanding of CDA's meaning-making processes, i.e., processes of production, processes of consumption, and processes of distribution (Eleonora and KhosraviNik, 2023: 15) within the Chinese context. To use KhosraviNik's (2023) words, language is powerful in its context of use, i.e., who is saying what to whom, in what manner and why, hence analysing communication without the context of use is a descriptive

endeavour at best (KhosraviNik, 2023: 1). Yet, considering the CCP implemented large-scale and sophisticated media censorship and surveillance, the discursive meaning-making processes in China are different to the West. In short, not only are all processes (e.g., production, consumption, and distribution) radically different compared to what is assumed in the West, i.e., heavily controlled by the party, but they are also greatly influenced by the CCP's political ideologies. Against this backdrop, collecting and analysing reliable and transparent media data (i.e., texts) of the 2019 Hong Kong protests from Chinese state and social media proved to be challenging. Despite everything, this thesis is among the few to analyse political legitimacy and identity in China through a CDA prism effectively and at a large scale. Part of this endeavour is to constantly aspire to be context-sensitive while being as systematic as possible.

In conclusion, by setting the case (i.e., the 2019 Hong Kong protests) at the intersection of discourse studies, political communication, and Chinese media ecology, this research offers a timely and extensive discursive analysis of how China/the CCP's self-representation at this historical intersection. By applying a robust and eclectic theoretical approach (i.e., CDA) in a non-Western context, this thesis offers a large scale examples of application of this method by meticulously examining a set of carefully selected Chinese media texts within its context critically.

7.5 Limitations and Directions for Future Study

This thesis is not without its own limitations in terms of design and scope. Firstly, considering this thesis focuses on Chinese media's narrative regarding the 2019 Hong Kong protests, thus, I primarily collected data from Chinese state media and social media discourses and took less consideration of media platforms outside China. e.g., Hong Kong local media and Western mass media. Although I collected several articles from SCMP, the sample is still too small compared to Chinese state media data, which may lead to insufficient comparison regarding the protests. In addition, data selected from the Chinese side has been limited to certain media platforms, e.g., People's Daily, China Daily, Weibo and WeChat, instead of collecting data from other influential media platforms, such as CCTV, Zhihu and Douban.

Furthermore, using CDA method may be criticised for being too subjective or biased. For instance, Widdowson (1995, 2004) and Shi (2009) criticised CDA users only

choosing specific texts which may be suitable for their political aims and implementing their own ideologies to the explanation process of the texts (for more details, please see 3.2). Apart from this, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and worldwide travel ban, especially the strictest centralised isolation policy in mainland China from 2020 to 2022, hence the researcher did not have a chance to return to China to collect the first-hand data, such as using face-to-face interviews or questionnaire methods. This caused this thesis only analyse data from secondary sources and thus may provide less insightful viewpoints of the protests.

Regarding future studies, the unfolding developments in Hong Kong, notably the ramifications of the NSL, is necessary for a thorough academic examination, given their profound implications for the city's socio-political landscape and broader geopolitical repercussions. Once a beacon of autonomy and civil liberties, Hong Kong now grapples with the realities of the NSL, which could reshape the city's activism, judicial independence and media freedoms. As these internal dynamics shift, it is imperative to understand how Hong Kong's social movements, which once championed democracy and liberty, adapt and evolve under the NSL's shackles. For instance, will the protestors find innovative avenues to voice their aspirations, or will the severe presence of the NSL overshadow them? This transformation should undoubtedly be a significant area for scholars' attention.

In addition, the broader relations of China with the West, especially the United States, are noteworthy for researchers' focus. The CCP's governance model, characterised by a blend of nationalism, economic development, and the 'wolf-warrior' foreign policy, demands comprehensive analysis. Understanding the CCP's motivations for suppressing dissent both domestically and abroad will offer invaluable insights into its geopolitical ambitions and strategies. Moreover, in light of Beijing's ambitions, Taiwan's status as a stronghold of democracy in the Asia-Pacific region has become even more critical. An in-depth exploration and analysis of Taiwan's future trajectory, considering its symbolic and strategic significance, will be pivotal in gauging the balance of power in the region and the potential implications for democratic values on a global scale.

Finally, the potential shift in global order, accompanied by the rise of China, deserves academics' attention. If the CCP wishes to extend its influence in the Asia-Pacific, especially by exerting control or directly invasion Taiwan, the resulting geopolitical

shifts could redefine international alliances, reshape global orders, and create an unimaginable economic and political paradigm. Thus, in the face of these transformative events, the academic circle is responsible for providing insights and perspectives on these issues and ensuring the world will pass these tumultuous times.

7.5.1 The Researcher's Positionality Statement

I long held the belief that an ideal researcher must strive for full neutrality - to not 'taint' his/her research with individuality and position himself/herself as an 'omnipotent expert in control of research subjects and research processes' (England, 1994: 81). In other words, the researcher was seen to unearth universal truths rather than to provide explanations for them (Warren, 1988). However, as Stanley and Wise point out:

> Whether we like it or not, researchers remain human beings complete with all the usual assembly of feelings, failings and moods. And all of these things influence how we [sic] feel and understand what is going on. Our [sic] consciousness is always the medium through which the research occurs; there is no method or technique of doing research other than through the medium of the research (1983: 157).

Yet, I believe that every researcher should elaborate on their positionality, which 'reflects the position that the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study' (Holmes, 2020: 2). Various aspects including personal experience (e.g., education and life experience), background (e.g., place of birth and nationality) might shape one's positionality towards specific issues (e.g., identity, race). This is partly why the overall orientations e.g., political views and stances are subjective and contextual (Chiseri-Strater, 1996), thus leading to multiple subjectivities on a single topic (e.g., the 2019 Hong Kong protests).

According to Savin-Baden and Major (2013), a researcher may identify and develop their positionality by (1). Locating themselves about the subject (i.e., acknowledging personal positions that have the potential to influence the research); (2). Locating themselves about the participants (i.e., researchers individually considering how they view themselves, as well as how others view them, while at the same time acknowledging that as individuals they may not be fully aware of how they and others have constructed their identities, and recognising that it may not be possible to do this without considered in-depth thought and critical analysis); (3). Locating themselves about the research context and process (i.e., acknowledging that research will necessarily be influenced by themselves and by the research context) (Holmes, 2020:

3). In providing full disclosure, I would place myself within these frames and clarify my positions regarding a). the research subject (e.g., the 2019 Hong Kong protests), b). the theoretical and methodological approach (e.g., CDA), and c). the research context (e.g., the broad Chinese sociopolitical situation and media ecology) of this thesis.

In terms of the subject, I take the 2019 Hong Kong protests as a case study (for a wider question on Chinese identity and legitimation) by collecting media discourses from multiple media platforms. This is to investigate how Self (Chinese) and Other (Hong Kong/Western) would represent the same protests. That being said, this thesis takes a particular focus on the Chinese side rather than providing a systematically balanced comparison, illustrating how the CCP, through twisting and fabricating Chinese media discourse, may have propagated, concealed and distorted the perception, representation, and fundamental aim of the protests, hence igniting nationalist sentiments among the Chinese public with the overall aim of legitimising the CCP's rule and de-legitimise others' counter-narratives.

Being a native Chinese of over thirty years living and growing up in China (including studying for 16 years and 7 years of working experience there), I am proud of what the country has achieved so far. However, specific lived experiences inside and abroad have affected and modified outlook on life, worldview, and value system, making me increasingly lean towards pursuing freedom, democracy and universal values. This would include my experience and knowledge of censorship and top-down management of narratives inside the country as well as getting familiarised with non-hierarchical systems in the West. A combination of this developmental experiences inform the analytical perspective of this research. For example, my pro-democracy stance (toward the protests/protestors) shapes the research questions (see 1.5) I was asking and approaches (i.e., CDA, see Chapter 3) I was utilising. Moreover, this position (i.e., pro-democracy) also influences the interpretation of data regardless of methodological protections, (i.e., critique of the CCP's suppressive dealing with the protestors and bloody crackdown of the protests) and the wider interpretive context of the findings (i.e., elaborating on the dynamic of zealous nationalist emotions among the Chinese public and how this relates to the CCP's discursive instigations to brush-wash the Hong Kong freedom seeking aspirations.

Furthermore, given that the CCP has swiftly passed the draconian NSL (see 7.3) in mid-2020, combining the Hong Kong legislature passing strict security law (i.e., Article

23 within the Basic Law) this March (BBC, 2024), it is highly unlikely that similar social movements would happen again in short term future. However, as Hung (2022) states, Hong Kong has shown its intransigent will to fight for greater autonomy many times before, and this time is no exception. The claim that Hong Kong is dead is again exaggerated (Hung, 2022: 217). As a novice researcher interested in (Chinese) political communication and international politics, I agree with his claim and trust Hong Kong's nirvana is at hand.

My positionality is also manifested in the theory and practice of the main approach I have adopted for this research. Critical Discourse Analysis is viewed within a critical sociological frame where the research serves as a means for betterment and raising awareness. In other words, CDA supports an interventionist understanding of scholarly practice, which would require explanatory contextualisation beyond the 'scientific' description (Wodak and Meyer, 2016). While the methodological measures are put in place, I would consider myself a participant (i.e., a critical discourse analyst) in this thesis, with crucial knowledge of context and socio-political processes of meaning-making. As an interdisciplinary and qualitative approach to language in use, CDA is dedicated to improving our understanding of how discourse (as a unique social practice), 'figures in social processes, social structures and social change' (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018: 1) through taking texts as the central unit for analysis. In Richardson's (2018) words, 'CDA is, properly, the critical analysis of text in context' (ibid: 165). In the meantime, there has been criticism of CDA as being subjective and biased, e.g., in its data selection and interpretation (Hammersley, 1997). While this line of critique has helped strengthened the methodological rigour of the approach, it fundamentally ignores the value and integration of explanatory interpretations in the course of such research (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018: 7) or involves fundamental conceptual confusions (e.g., Widdowson, 1996; see 3.2), among others (e.g., Shi, 2009; also see 3.2).

Certainly, each research approach is debated within its intra/inter-disciplinary lines and CDA is no exception. Yet, what I tried to do in this thesis is to alleviate these issues (see above) by clearly explaining the data selection and interpretation process (see 3.5.1) and, at the same time, by elaborating on the wider context, i.e., Chinese social, economic, and political circumstances and public sphere (i.e., the context of the texts, see Chapter 2) in detail. Beyond this, I flagged individual position (of the subject) and self-reflectivity vis-à-vis data and research process. As part of CDA systematic

operationality, there have also been aspirations ‘to engage in multi-perspectival studies involving triangulation data; and to consider multiple perspectives when it comes to interpretation, making sure to separate out interpretation from analysis’ (Flowerdew and Richardson, 2018: 7).

However, it is noteworthy that discourse, or language in use in general, is a human social construct. Thus, interpretations and analyses of discourse are inevitably individually and subjectively constructed as well (von-Glaserfield, 1988). CDA, as a qualitative approach with a problem-oriented slant, endeavours to make implicit language use explicit. This process aids in debunking authority claims or sustaining fights against inequalities (van Dijk, 2001), thereby facilitating social emancipation and potentially bringing about social change. Given those mentioned above, I argue that CDA is not only reasonable when applied to this thesis but also fully adaptable to this case study.

Regarding the research context (i.e., Chinese sociopolitical and media circumstances), as a Chinese national born in the late 1980s, I witnessed and benefited from this country’s enormous economic progression since implementing the reform and opening-up policy. Although economic development does not mean everything and cannot conceal other social problems (e.g., corruption, environmental destruction), it enhanced our national self-confidence and pride by providing a new lens to the world. However, in the last few years, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, I have come to feel that China seems to be ‘turning back’. Economically, due to the gradual decoupling from Western countries (i.e., the USA), the Chinese government increasingly emphasises self-reliance and autarky policy (e.g., the dual circulation development paradigm, see 2.2.2). On the other, Chinese foreign policy has abolished what Deng Xiaoping mentioned as ‘keep a low profile and concentrate on self-improvement’ (Taoguang Yanghui, “韬光养晦”) towards becoming more offensive and hawkish.

From the sociopolitical perspective, the CCP continued to tighten its grip on society (e.g., centralised/mandatory quarantine regulation during the pandemic) and suppress the public sphere (e.g., the large-scale media censorship and surveillance), further exacerbating the Chinese media system. As a former industry newspaper journalist, I remember how prosperous the Chinese media ecology once was. Given my own work experience, I consent what Bandurski and Fang (2020) state, that is, media censorship

was always on and never relaxed or removed in China, once there was room for investigative journalism and commercialised newspapers (e.g., the Southern Weekly). However, everything has changed since Xi Jinping started his tenure in 2012. On the one hand, investigative journalism in China has no longer found the space they had due to Xi's stubborn and tough stance toward media control. On the other, though Chinese digital media technology (e.g., WeChat) offers alternative choices for its consumers (to get more information), it also brings more centralised control and turns their devices (i.e., smartphones) into tools of official surveillance (Bandurski and Fang, 2020).

To sum up, as a qualitative approach, CDA has been employed in this thesis to critically analyse texts in their context. Despite criticism of CDA for potential cherry-picking and bias in data selection and interpretation (see 3.5.1), I have endeavoured to make this thesis's data selection and analysis process as systematic and objective as possible. Nevertheless, it is essential to acknowledge that escaping one's subjectivity in an explanatory investigation, especially within a CDS framework, is challenging. On the other hand, the aftermath of the 2019 Hong Kong protests and the imposition of the draconian NSL, combined with the global pandemic of COVID-19, not only exacerbated the confrontation between China and the West but also deteriorated China's sociopolitical and economic circumstances, leading to increased public resentment and grievance. Against this backdrop, the party-state has resorted to more authoritarian measures to quell dissent and prevent the diffusion of any potentially destabilising factors into society. All the abovementioned factors have reminded me that China's future is fraught with instability and uncertainty, and this is consistent with my being a Chinese native and my lived experiences in China and studying abroad.

7.6 Last Word and Self-Reflection

I remember when I enrolled in Newcastle University in 2019 as a 1st year PhD researcher, my research topic was focusing on analysing discourses from Chinese mass media regarding the Reform and Open Up period. However, after several attempts' revisions and redesigns, both supervisors and I thought this topic was too broad and may not be finished within 3 years. Thus, at that time I thought two research aspects: one is the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, another is the 2019 Hong Kong protests. I must confess both topics are sensitive enough in mainland China, but my primary research interest never moved away from politics, no matter from China or

worldwide. As I remembered when I saw a Chinese YouTuber called Wang Jian during my research, he said two mottos, one is '*In China, you do not have to pay attention to politics*; *however, when things go wrong, politics will come to you*'. This means politics is hidden in Chinese people's daily life, from the smallest things such as shopping, eating and entertaining, to the most important things such as employment and promotion. Everything is manipulated by politics, that is partly because of power and the political system in China - the CCP's authoritarian rule. The other is '*Democracy cannot be eaten as a meal, but without democracy, you will have nothing to eat*'. These sentences deeply motivated me; thus I have decided to chase the topic of democracy and finally chose the 2019 Hong Kong protests as my research topic.

However, Covid-19 pandemic erupted out in early 2020. Luckily, my wife and I had just returned to Newcastle days before the pandemic broke out in China. As mentioned before, due to the pandemic and the strictest quarantine policy in the world, I did not have the chance to return to China for first hand data which was a shame, but everybody had to do adjustments and adaptations to the new conditions. I initially hoped to collect data from Chinese ordinary citizens regarding the protests by questionnaire and face to face interviews in mid-2021 to triangulate my data sets better, but I had to find another way to push forward with the project as travelling had become almost impossible. Thus, I had to rely more heavily on data from Chinese state and social media platforms. In hindsight, given a second chance, I would go for collecting my primary data first, instead of just focusing on representation of the protests on media.

As for the next step after successfully pass the viva and graduation, currently I do not think I will publish a book based on this thesis as many of my PhD colleagues and scholars do. That is due to the topic's sensitivity and that current China's political climate is tougher and scarier than 10 or 20 years ago due to Xi Jinping changed the constitution in 2018 and has started his 3rd but probably unlimited tenure. Considering the infamous NSL, I do not know where the boundaries of academic freedom in China are. It is too uncertain and vague but also seems far and near at the same time. My past working experience as a journalist in China indicates that the sensitivity level can sometimes change faster than one can expect. However, it is still my research interest to observe the post-NSL era in Hong Kong, and how this infamous law may affect and eradicate Hong Kong's social movements and democracy struggles.

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