Western Perceptions of Hong Kong Ten Years On: A Corpus-driven Critical Discourse Study

1,⁎WINNIE CHENG and 2,†PHOENIX W. Y. LAM

1Department of English, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Hong Kong, and 2Department of English Language and Literature, Hong Kong Baptist University, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong
*E-mail: egwcheng@polyu.edu.hk, †E-mail: engplam@hkbu.edu.hk

This article studies the Western perceptions of and relations with Hong Kong a decade after the reversion of the sovereignty from Britain to China in 1997. Previous studies have demonstrated that the West had a significantly negative view on the future of Hong Kong with respect to the handover. According to recent observations, however, the perceptions of the West have undergone a noticeable change. This article aims at investigating the West’s understanding, opinions and positions regarding Hong Kong today compared with those in 1997. The possible reasons for any changes are also investigated. Through the integration of the theories and methods of corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis and the use of two corpus linguistic software, ConcGram and Wmatrix, the present article examines a range of Western public discourse of Hong Kong concerning the handover. The purpose of the article is to yield insights into the New Hong Kong in the eyes of the West, which in turn contributes to a re-examination of the relations and power balance between the West and China.

INTRODUCTION

More than a century of British colonial administration in Hong Kong ended when the territory reverted to Chinese sovereignty on 1 July 1997. Widely projected as a ‘global media spectacle’ (Lee et al. 2002: 3), the handover of Hong Kong received unprecedented coverage from the press both in the East and the West.¹ To investigate the Western perceptions of and relations with Hong Kong before and after the handover, this study examines and compares texts from various Western and Chinese media sources collected from two three-year periods: 1996–1998 and 2006–2008. Modelled on the approach of corpus-assisted discourse studies (Partington 2006; Baker et al. 2008; Freake et al. 2011; Tarasheva 2011) and combining the theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches of corpus linguistics (CL) and critical discourse analysis (CDA), the article reports on a ‘corpus-driven’ (Tognini-Bonelli
2001: 11) critical discourse study (CDS) (van Dijk 2008) which aims to discover, through the analysis of frequent lexical and semantic patterns, whether there are any changes in the West’s understanding, opinions and positions regarding Hong Kong today compared with those in 1997 and the possible reasons for such changes.

CL is an empirical method of linguistic analysis and description, which accommodates the full evidence of corpus data by accounting for all the instances of the linguistic phenomena concerned (Leech 1992) and analyses the evidence with the aim of finding ‘probabilities, trends, patterns, co-occurrences of elements, features or groupings of features’ (Teubert and Krishnamurthy 2007: 6). Basic CL research methods include the study of wordlists, keywords, collocates, and concordances, which are collections of ‘the occurrences of a word-form, each in its own textual environment’ (Sinclair 1991: 32) and can be qualitatively analysed in terms of semantic and functional or attitudinal meanings (Sinclair 1996). Other examples of CL techniques, particularly using the computer tools Wmatrix (Rayson 2001) and ConcGram 1.0 (Greaves 2009), include automatic semantic annotation and the generation of concgrams. They, respectively, involve adding semantic tags to every item in a corpus and fully automatically producing sets of words which co-occur regardless of constituency variation (e.g. AB and A*B), positional variation (e.g. AB and BA), or both (Cheng et al. 2006, 2009). The value of the two resources to corpus linguistic research has been documented separately in previous studies (Ali 2007; Rayson 2008; Cheng et al. 2009), yet the potential of using them together has not been explored thus far. This study therefore presents a novel methodological approach that incorporates both tools in the qualitative and quantitative analyses.

In CDA, major theoretical approaches have been developed due to varying historical backgrounds, theoretical orientations and research focuses, and they include French discourse analysis (Pêcheux 1982), critical linguistics (Fowler et al. 1975; Kress and Hodge 1979), social semiotics (Hodge and Kress 1988; Kress and van Leeuwen 1990), textually oriented discourse analysis (Fairclough 1989, 1992), sociocognitive studies (van Dijk 1980, 1993), and the discourse-historical method (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Wodak 2001). Nevertheless, they all share some common features, namely CDA addresses social problems; power relations are discursive; discourse constitutes society and culture; discourse does ideological work; discourse is historical; the link between text and society is mediated; discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory; and discourse is a form of social action (Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 271–280).

The present study adopts Fairclough’s (1992) three-dimensional conception of discourse as text, discursive practice and social practice, or ‘language as discourse and as social practice’ (Fairclough 2001: 21), that brings together three analytical traditions: ‘the tradition of close textual and linguistic analysis within linguistics, the macrosociological tradition of analysing social practice in relation to social structures, and the interpretivist or microsociological tradition
of seeing social practice as something which people actively produce and make sense of on the basis of shared commonsense procedures’ (Fairclough 1992: 73). Fairclough’s (2001: 1) textually oriented discourse analysis highlights ‘the significance of language in the production, maintenance, and change of social relations of power’.

Despite its value in addressing social events and promoting social change, CDA as an influential postmodern paradigm is not without criticism. A main criticism centres on the highly subjective nature of CDA. While Fairclough (2003: 14–15) argues that ‘there is no such thing as an “objective” analysis’, the fact that CDA studies are often based on a small number of arbitrarily selected texts implies that analysis is only selective and multiple readings are possible (Flowerdew 2008; Gabrielatos and Baker 2008). The heavy emphasis on textual features also leads some to query the role of context in CDA work, as contextualization is often ‘a priori’ and presented merely as a background of ‘unquestionable facts’ (Blommaert 2005: 52). Another criticism of CDA, especially of earlier work in the area, is that its methodology is not systematic and rigorous (Rogers 2004: 14) but tends to be anecdotal (McCabe et al. 2009).

By adopting ‘an eclectic approach’ (Baker 2006: 16) that combines CL and CDA theories and methods, this corpus-based CDS attempts to adopt a more systematic and rigorous methodology to derive trends, patterns, and co-occurrences of various linguistic elements from large sets of data (Teubert and Krishnamurthy 2007), from which political and social ideologies are revealed.

THE WESTERN VIEWS OF HONG KONG IN 1997

On 30 June 1997, Prince Charles summed up the British colonial legacy as ‘Britain is part of Hong Kong’s history and Hong Kong is part of Britain’s history. We are also a part of each other’s future’ (Chicago Tribune 30 June 1997), thus reassuring Hong Kong that its future, to a certain extent, will always be a British concern. The United States, as a chief voice of the West, also claimed its ‘guardianship’ over Hong Kong after the handover to preserve the capitalist enclave from communist cruelty (Lee et al. 2001). Previous research studies (Flowerdew 1997a,b; Shi-Xu and Kienpointner 2001; Pan 2002; Shi-Xu et al. 2005) have shown that Western public discourses towards the handover of Hong Kong were overwhelmingly pessimistic, negative, and even cynical in 1997, and that Communist China was regarded as the main reason for such a strong reaction.

Specifically, Western discourses were particularly concerned about whether Hong Kong would enjoy autonomy as promised and guaranteed by ‘one country, two systems’ and the Basic Law;2 whether democracy and rule of law could be preserved; and whether Hong Kong people would be able to enjoy individual liberties (Lee et al. 2001; Pan 2002). Most of these studies perceived the handover as a decolonization of Hong Kong from Britain to China (Shi-Xu and Kienpointner 2001; Shi-Xu et al. 2005) and the reversion of Hong Kong
from capitalism to communism. Chris Patten, the last British Governor of Hong Kong, implemented the ‘last-minute electoral reform’ (Bhatia 1997; Lee et al. 2001: 358) in 1995 to reverse Britain’s anti-democratic record in Hong Kong for 150 years. His effort was widely recognized by the Western media, and he was hailed as ‘the protector of Hong Kong’s fragile democracy sailing into the dark’ (Lee et al. 2001: 358). The implicature was a distrust of the Chinese government among the Western media.

While the handover was an unprecedented event, ‘a theatre, a site, and a moment’ (Lee et al. 2002: 86) that commanded the attention of political leaders and media worldwide, it was also a discursive battle between the West and China. Past studies have shown the stereotypical image the West had of China and their vested imperialist desires (Said 1993; Flowerdew 1997a; Lee et al. 2001) to instil doubt or even hostility in the audience towards the Chinese government’s handling of the return of Hong Kong (Flowerdew 1997a; Lee et al. 2001; Pan 2002). When reporting the handover, Western media discourses seemed to characterize Hong Kong in ways that matched with their own interests and simultaneously restricted the Cultural Other’s freedom of thinking and speaking. To justify their imperialism and colonization, the British media, for instance, emphasized how they had given the small island modern civilization and a good legacy, namely freedom, prosperity, the rule of law, and an efficient civil service (Lee et al. 2001). Said’s (1993) notion of ‘imperial construction of Orientalism’ suggests that Britain brings civilization to barbaric people (Said 1993: xi) and that ‘you are what you are because of us; when we left, you reverted to your deplorable state’ (Said 1993: 35). This view is echoed in Patten’s (1997) remark that Hong Kong was the only decolonized place with less freedom and democracy than when it was a colony.

THE WESTERN VIEW OF HONG KONG TEN YEARS ON

By 2007, when Hong Kong celebrated the tenth anniversary of the handover, the West’s perceptions of Hong Kong had undergone a conspicuous change. Many Western public discourses had emerged which affirmed the achievements of Hong Kong after 1997. Once certified dead by Fortune (26 June 1995: 118) magazine with its sensational cover story ‘The Death of Hong Kong’, Hong Kong became a journalists’ favourite again among the Western media, receiving approving comments such as ‘Hong Kong Reinvents Itself, Yet Again’ (Spiegel Online International 29 June 2007), ‘Hong Kong is more alive than ever’ (Time 7 June 2007), and ‘The protest took place without interference from the police, however: the latest sign that the Hong Kong government continues to protect individual liberties’ (The New York Times 1 July 2007). These generally expressed positive views towards Hong Kong during the first 10 years under Chinese sovereignty.

However, studies on western perceptions of present-day Hong Kong are few. Instead, research has focused on local education reform, the interrelationship between the use of English and Chinese, and (cultural) identity in
post-colonial Hong Kong (Bark 1997; Potts 1998; Lai 1999; Tsui and Bunton 2000; Evans and Green 2001; Chan 2002; Choi 2003; Bray and Koo 2004; Lui 2007). For instance, it is argued that Hong Kong people differentiate themselves from their mainland counterparts through language choices (Bolton 2000; Li 2000; Morrison and Lui 2000) and the common law (Sin 2006). The cultural identity of Hong Kong people is also marked by their political concerns and the citizens’ collective actions that challenge the authorities. Such identity shaping cannot be achieved without the support of the media (Flowerdew 2004; Chan and Lee 2007). An examination of media texts is thus necessary to understand how perceptions of Hong Kong have changed.

CDA RESEARCH IN MEDIA DISCOURSE STUDIES

In CDA, discursive events regarding dominance and inequality are favourite sites of research. Studies have been conducted to find out ideological divergence on a national level and conflict between different interest groups and events that bring about social change, for example, organizational reform (Harrison and Young 2005); state policies on issues such as housing (Marston 2000), decision-making (Bhatia 1997), and disabled people (Grue 2009); and worldwide concerns including globalization (Pardo 2001), human rights (Le 2002; Cheng and Lam 2010) and genetically modified food (Augoustinos et al. 2010). CDA has its strength in documenting and contrasting multiple and competing discourses, whether in a conflict or in a shift in the social/historical process (Flowerdew 1997a; Vaara and Tienari 2002; Taylor 2004; Kuo and Nakamura 2005; Pearce 2005).

In critical analyses of media discourse, powerful public figures such as political leaders are often found to use language for manipulative purposes that aim to enact, reproduce, and legitimize their power and domination (Fairclough 1989; Flowerdew 1997c, 2002, 2008; van Dijk 2001). Media studies also show the rather lopsided representations of the less powerful by those in power through ideology construction and dissemination. Groups which are considered the Cultural or Social Other by the media are often portrayed in a negative light, for example, racist representations of Africans and Vietnamese in British and Australian newspapers (Brookes 1995; Teo 2000), and prejudiced representation of Muslim women wearing veils in American newspapers (Byng 2010). Such portrayals of minority communities discursively segregated from the majority population are not uncommon in the mass media (Erjavec 2001; Pietikäinen 2003; Harding 2006). Variation in subject aside, these studies all point to the systematic discriminating, marginalizing and stereotyping of the communities concerned based on their ethnic, racial or religious difference, as compared with Western society. Through the (repeated) employment of such discriminatory discursive practices, the mainstream Western media succeed in constructing a highly polarized ‘them versus us’ image, thereby playing a part in helping to maintain the hegemony of the West. While such discriminatory discursive practices are commonly used against racially or
religiously distinct communities as discussed above, they are also sometimes found within communities of similar social and linguistic backgrounds, as evidenced by the intra-ethnic discrimination of mainland Chinese claiming the right of abode in Hong Kong in news articles from the city’s leading newspaper (Flowerdew et al. 2002).

Apart from discrimination, national conflict is often examined in CDA studies. Fang (2001), for instance, investigated how textual elements, particularly global structures such as headlines and themes, are employed to justify certain foreign policies in two politically conflicting regimes through analysing civil unrest cases as reported in newspapers in mainland China and Taiwan. Li (2009) examined the effects of intertextuality on the discursive construction of national identities in two newspapers in the United States and China to find out how these two ideologically different nations are represented at points of conflict in Sino-American relations. Atawneh (2009) shows how speech acts associated with the Israelis and the Palestinians in media texts mirror the relative power status of the two nations in a conflict. Such examples demonstrate the discursive strategies employed and the strong connections between discursive practices and the ideologies shaping national identities.

In a recent study, Baker et al. (2008) examined the discursive presentation of refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and migrants in the British press from 1996 to 2005. Focusing on keyness and collocation, they examined lexical patterns primarily involving the four key terms: ‘refugee(s)’, ‘asylum seeker(s)’, ‘immigrants(s)’, and ‘migrant(s)’, followed by analysis of their concordances. Findings show the prevailing negative representation of such minority groups in the press, demonstrating the value of combining CL and CDA in tracing ideological changes over time.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The study aims to compare the Western and Chinese media discourses related to Hong Kong’s handover, collected from around the time of the handover in 1997 and the tenth anniversary in 2007. The research questions are: How have the Western perceptions of Hong Kong changed over the intervening decade, especially when compared with the Chinese, and what are the possible reasons for the changes? To address the questions, two corpora of media texts, each split into two time periods, were specifically built, and examined linguistically and contextually. The study analysed collocation, semantic preference and semantic prosody (Sinclair 1996). Collocation refers to the co-selection of words. Semantic preference is concerned with ‘the restriction of regular co-occurrence to items which share a semantic feature’ (Sinclair 2004: 142) and semantic prosody is concerned with the overall functional or attitudinal meaning of a lexical item, which indicates ‘how the rest of the item is to be interpreted functionally’ (Sinclair 2004: 34). Semantic prosody can be broadly classified as favourable, unfavourable or neutral. In the analysis, a number of contextual factors such as social, economic, historical, and political parameters
were discussed to explain why there are changes in the Western perceptions of and relations with Hong Kong. The deliberation of such contexts offers a multi-faceted view to the dialectical relationship between text, discourse, ideology, and social practices (Fairclough 2003; Flowerdew 2004; Fairclough et al. 2007; van Dijk 2009).

Data were collected from two three-year periods: 1996–1998 and 2006–2008. The search items ‘Hong Kong’ and ‘handover’ were used together to retrieve related reports and articles from the media sources. These texts were then gathered to compile the Western Media Corpus (WMC) and the Chinese Media Corpus (CMC), which comprised materials relevant to (issues related to) the handover of Hong Kong. The WMC contains editorials, feature stories, and news articles retrieved from two databases: Newspaper Source (EBSCOhost) and ProQuest. Newspaper Source provides an abundant resource of full texts for more than 260 regional newspapers and 25 national newspapers and magazines such as USA Today, The Washington Post, The Washington Times, The Times (London), Financial Times, Wall Street Journal, and Economist. ProQuest provides an archive of sources ranging from historical newspapers, periodicals to dissertations, and other relevant scholarly resources. In addition to printed materials, the database also contains editorials, feature stories, and interviews from broadcast media such as CBS News, CNN, and BBC. Apart from the two databases above, international organizations such as Amnesty International and Congressional Research Service have also issued special reports on human rights and politics concerning the situation in Hong Kong, and these were also included in the data for analysis.

The CMC comprises editorials, feature stories, and news articles from two sources, that is, Wise News and the South China Morning Post Archive. Wise News is a source of newspaper articles from regions of Hong Kong, Mainland China, Macau, and Taiwan. Prominent newspapers such as People’s Daily, China Business Times, Economic Daily in the Mainland; Hong Kong Economic Times and South China Morning Post in Hong Kong; and China Times, Commercial Times and United Daily News in Taiwan are included in the database. The South China Morning Post Archive provides access specifically to the South China Morning Post published since 1993, including editorials, feature stories, and news reports. Since the language used in such news sources is English, these publications mainly target an English-speaking readership in the Greater China Region. Table 1 shows the word counts of the four corpora.

Wmatrix (Rayson 2001) and ConcGram 1.0 (Greaves 2009) were used to search for frequencies and patterns in the WMC and CMC. As a first step, ConcGram provided information on the frequency distribution regarding the most frequently occurring two-word concgrams across the four corpora. Secondly, Wmatrix yielded quantitative information regarding the most frequent semantic categories in the four corpora, followed by a key semantic tag analysis to identify semantic categories that are, statistically speaking, significantly more frequent in one corpus when compared with another. As the main
The focus of this article is to investigate how the present Western perceptions of Hong Kong compare with those during the handover period and with the Chinese perceptions, WMC2006–2008 was used as the study corpus, and was compared with the other three reference corpora, namely the Western corpus of a decade earlier and the two Chinese corpora. This three-way comparison reveals the diachronic change in terms of the key semantic categories in Western media discourses as well as the contrast between Western and Chinese perceptions of the handover of Hong Kong. Using the Wmatrix facility, significance was calculated using the Log Likelihood statistic, with the minimum statistical significance set at $p \leq 10^{-2}$, $LL \geq 6.63$, a threshold which is frequently used in corpus-based research (McEnery 2006: 233, n. 32).

The third step involved the use of ConcGram to generate two-word concgrams which contained the most frequent words in the key semantic categories, followed by detailed examination of relevant concordance lines to identify their semantic preference and prosody. The further analysis of such dominant semantic categories in context through concgrams and concordances provides a window into the underlying ideological assumptions and values of the linguistic manifestation, and whether such assumptions and values have changed over time. In other words, the largely qualitative CDA is informed and driven by the findings generated from the quantitative and qualitative corpus and linguistic analyses.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Two-word concgrams

The examination of the recurring concgrams in a corpus offers a first glimpse of the dominant themes and topics throughout the texts and whether and how they differ from other corpora. In this connection, a comparison was made between the Chinese and Western Media Corpora in the two time periods to identify the top ten most frequently occurring two-word concgrams (Table A1), with the exclusion of some major grammatical items.  

### Table 1: Word counts of the Western and Chinese Media corpora

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Number of texts</th>
<th>Number of words</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western Media Corpus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996–1998</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>103,463</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006–2008</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>78,204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese Media Corpus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996–1998</td>
<td>726</td>
<td>540,272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006–2008</td>
<td>1,429</td>
<td>964,485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,427</td>
<td>1,686,424</td>
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</table>
Diachronically, more differences are found between the Western Media Corpora of the two periods when compared with their Chinese counterparts. Specifically, nine out of the top ten two-word concgrams are the same for CMC1996–1998 and CMC2006–2008 (all except Mr/Tung in CMC1996–1998 and Chief/executive in CMC2006–2008). In contrast, only five two-word concgrams are common in the lists of WMC1996–1998 and WMC2006–2008 (Hong/Kong, Kong/Hong, Kong’s/Hong, more/than, than/more). In other words, the two Chinese Media Corpora show a stronger degree of similarity in themes and topics. Indeed, three quotation-related concgrams are only found in the Chinese media texts (Mr/said, Hong/said, Kong/said). These resemblances suggest that the perceptions of Hong Kong in the Chinese media may have changed little over time. The differences in the frequency distribution of two-word concgrams in the two Western Media Corpora indicate a more conspicuous change in the Western perceptions of Hong Kong over time, suggesting a perceived contrast between the Old and New Hong Kong. WMC2006–2008 is particularly distinct from the others as four of its top ten two-word concgrams are unique, with the presence of three people-related concgrams (Kong/people, people/Kong, Hong/people).

**Key semantic categories**

Apart from individual lexical concgrams, the specific changes in the dominant themes and topics of the corpora may also be detected through the semantic groupings of individual lexical words. In this respect, a key semantic category analysis was conducted to compare the most frequent semantic categories across the four corpora. To discover the changes in the Western perceptions of Hong Kong, and specifically how the Western perceptions differ from those in the past, a three-way comparison was carried out with WMC2006–2008 as the study corpus and the other three corpora as reference corpora to identify the top twenty key semantic categories (Table A2).

Findings further support the two initial observations from the two-word concgram analysis. First, when WMC2006–2008 is compared with the two Chinese corpora, respectively (3rd and 4th columns, Table A2), half of the key semantic categories are the same, indirectly suggesting that Chinese perceptions of Hong Kong have not undergone significant changes over the periods concerned. Western media discourse during the handover, however, was considerably different from the Chinese media discourse regardless of time. Twelve of the top twenty key semantic categories are unique to the WMC2006–2008, showing that the dominant themes and topics in the Western media discourse at the time Hong Kong experienced a change of sovereignty are less similar to those represented in the Chinese media texts, whether during or a decade after 1997. Secondly, the comparison of the key semantic categories of WMC2006–2008 and WMC1996–1998 shows the preoccupation of issues related to people and their livelihood, as evidenced by such categories as ‘people’, ‘relationship: intimacy and sex’, ‘dead’, ‘vehicles
and transport on land’, ‘work and employment: generally’, and ‘clothes and personal belongings’. This is consistent with the high frequency of people-related concgrams in WMC2006–2008, suggesting a more people-oriented attitude in the Western media discourse ten years after the handover.

The similarities across the comparisons (Table A2) are revealing as regards the themes and topics which are significantly more common in WMC2006–2008 and thus merit further investigation. Of the three key semantic categories which are found across all the three comparisons (i.e. ‘politics’, ‘judgement of appearance: beautiful’ and ‘degree: boosters’), ‘politics’ consistently ranks the first. Politics-related issues, therefore, are given significantly more attention in the Western media discourse on Hong Kong in 2006–2008, when compared with a decade before and with the Chinese media discourse regardless of time. This possibly suggests the ‘increased politicization’ of Hong Kong people (Martin 2007), as perceived by the West in the New Hong Kong. To further understand how this dominant theme is linguistically realized in context and how this reflects the Western perceptions, the most frequent word in this semantic category, political, was examined by analysing its most frequent lexical concgram and relevant concordance lines. 5

The concgram political/Hong Kong

The most frequent two-word lexical concgram containing political is political/Hong Kong with frequencies ranging from 68 instances in WMC 2006–2008 to 370 in CMC 2006–2008 (Table A3). Findings from the collocational analysis show that across the four corpora, political/Hong Kong collocates with reform, party, system, and development, and the plural forms of these nouns, in the R1 position. Following Baker et al. (2008), these are referred to as c-collocates (consistent collocates). In the Western media discourses during the handover, political party and political parties are most frequently used, and the collocates give way to political system and political systems ten years later. In the Chinese media discourses, in both periods political party and political parties are frequent although the frequency decreases from 47.1 to 33.3 per cent in 10 years’ time. This finding regarding the most frequent collocate of political further supports the observation about more diachronic changes in the Western media texts than their Chinese counterparts.

Following the collocational analysis, the collocates were categorized into semantic fields and the wider context of political/Hong Kong was also analysed to find out the semantic preferences and prosodies (Table 2). Five main semantic preferences are identified, namely: (i) the influence of mainland China on the political reform, development or system in Hong Kong, (ii) Hong Kong political reform, development, or system, (iii) quoting the views of Hong Kong political parties or people, (iv) overseas or international influence on, or relations with, Hong Kong political reform, development or system, and (v) Hong Kong business, economy, or tourism. Each semantic preference was classified
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influence of mainland China on political reform/system in Hong Kong—unfavourable</td>
<td>4 (6.6%)</td>
<td>16 (28.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>10 (3.9%)</td>
<td>27 (5.7%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Influence of mainland China on political reform/system in Hong Kong—favourable or neutral</td>
<td>2 (3.3%)</td>
<td>7 (12.3%)</td>
<td>4 (4.2%)</td>
<td>38 (14.9%)</td>
<td>54 (11.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong political reform/system—unfavourable</td>
<td>7 (11.5%)</td>
<td>5 (8.8%)</td>
<td>10 (10.5%)</td>
<td>19 (7.5%)</td>
<td>43 (9.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong political reform/system—favourable or neutral</td>
<td>3 (4.9%)</td>
<td>4 (7.0%)</td>
<td>11 (11.6%)</td>
<td>59 (23.1%)</td>
<td>77 (16.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quoting Hong Kong political parties/people—unfavourable</td>
<td>14 (22.9%)</td>
<td>16 (28.0%)</td>
<td>16 (16.8%)</td>
<td>96 (37.6%)</td>
<td>137 (29.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quoting Hong Kong political parties/people—favourable or neutral</td>
<td>7 (11.5%)</td>
<td>5 (8.8%)</td>
<td>15 (15.8%)</td>
<td>19 (7.6%)</td>
<td>51 (10.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas/international influence or relation regarding political reform/system in Hong Kong—unfavourable</td>
<td>3 (4.9%)</td>
<td>4 (7.0%)</td>
<td>8 (8.4%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>15 (3.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overseas/international influence or relation regarding political reform/system in Hong Kong—favourable or neutral</td>
<td>5 (8.2%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>5 (5.3%)</td>
<td>7 (2.7%)</td>
<td>17 (3.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong business, economy or tourism—unfavourable</td>
<td>5 (8.2%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>13 (13.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>17 (3.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong business, economy or tourism—favourable or neutral</td>
<td>11 (18.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>13 (13.7%)</td>
<td>7 (2.7%)</td>
<td>32 (6.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61 (100%)</td>
<td>57 (100%)</td>
<td>95 (100%)</td>
<td>255 (100%)</td>
<td>470 (100%)</td>
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</table>
into one of the two types in terms of semantic prosody: unfavourable and favourable or neutral.

The main findings are that in WMC1996–1998, the most frequent semantic preference and prosody is quoting Hong Kong parties or people’s unfavourable views about Hong Kong’s political and economic situations (22.9 per cent) as seen in ‘Sino-UK rift over the governance of Hong Kong’, ‘political disputes ahead of the handover’, and ‘the political influence of Hong Kong’s tycoons’. The second is Hong Kong business, economy or tourism, with a favourable or neutral prosody (18 per cent), illustrated by ‘local firms benefit from mainland businesses with good political connections’, ‘freedom to make money in Hong Kong’, and ‘conduct business as usual despite political uncertainty’. Western perceptions of Hong Kong at that time were therefore mixed, with negative views mostly on political issues but positive or neutral views on business and economic aspects. The implication of such Western media texts is that, despite the political disharmony and uncertainty triggered by the change of sovereignty to China, the territory remained a thriving business centre, by virtue of inheriting desirable attributes such as freedom and prosperity from Britain (Said 1993; Lee et al. 2001).

Ten years after the handover, the views and positions of Western media discourses become dominated by reports on China’s influence on Hong Kong’s political reform, development or system (28 per cent), and quoting Hong Kong political parties or people (28 per cent), both unfavourably, constituting 56 per cent of the overall concordance lines of political/Hong Kong, for example, ‘re-interpretation of the Basic Law’ by the National People’s Congress (NPC) of China; China controlling ‘more strictly Hong Kong’s expectations of its ability to determine its own internal political framework and economic policies’; quoting political parties or individuals who comment negatively about ‘small-circle election’ being the ‘root cause of the political conflict and stalemates’; and ‘self-censorship in the media’ in their reports on Hong Kong’s political-related news. The dominance of largely unfavourable views on political issues a decade later shows how the city has become increasingly politicalized. There exists an increased level of political awareness and a higher level of political involvement of the local community (Chan and Chan 2007), both in voicing their political dissatisfaction and participating in political activities such as protests and elections (Chan and Lee 2007). This change in focus from the general political and economic environment to the specific views of people and parties 10 years later also accounts for the more frequent use of people-related two-word concgrams in WMC2006–2008 (Table A1).

Regarding the CMC, during the handover period, the two main semantic preferences and prosodies are quoting the views of Hong Kong political parties or people’s, both unfavourably (16.8 per cent) and favourably or neutrally (15.8 per cent), amounting to 32.6 per cent. Examples of unfavourable comments are a legislative councillor saying that in Hong Kong ‘economic decisions face political pressure’ and a democratic political party objecting to China’s negative political influence in Hong Kong. Favourable views include
a school principal being quoted as saying Hong Kong’s political system after the handover is stable and a security bureau spokesman saying ‘social, political, and economic systems have remained unchanged’. The third and fourth are Hong Kong business, economy, or tourism, with favourable (13.7 per cent) and unfavourable (13.7 per cent) prosodies equally distributed, totalling 27.4 per cent. Similar to the WMC in the same period, Chinese media discourses had rather mixed views towards the future of Hong Kong, with the quoting of views accounting for roughly one-third of the semantic preferences. When reporting the general political and economic scenes, the Chinese media were more positive towards the Hong Kong political system and China’s influence, but more sceptical when it came to the overseas influence, such as the links between foreign and local political parties. These opposite patterns observed in the WMC and CMC seem to suggest a ‘them versus us’ divide commonly observed in discriminatory discursive practices, whereby the Cultural Other was represented in a negative light and the Self was portrayed positively (cf. Brookes 1995; Teo 2000; Lee et al. 2001; Pan 2002). As such, Chinese media considered the influence exerted by China on the politics of Hong Kong to be acceptable, or even beneficial, but were suspicious of the foreign forces which ‘intruded’ upon local politics.

Ten years after the handover, Chinese media discourses are found to rely more on quoting Hong Kong political parties and people’s unfavourable views (37.6 versus 16.8 per cent), for example, a journalist being upset by the political environment of Hong Kong, some members of a political party being concerned about the political developments of Hong Kong, and a political party criticising another party for changing their stand regarding universal suffrage. On the other hand, favourable reporting includes some legislators saying that they are at the forefront of Hong Kong’s political development, and a pro-Beijing academic commenting on patriotic political parties that take part in elections in Hong Kong. The second most frequent semantic preference and prosody is Hong Kong political reform, development, or system reported in a favourable light (23.1 per cent), for example, ‘the well-run political system of Hong Kong’, ‘one country, two systems’ being a political model, Hong Kong becoming a ‘democratic society’ 10 years after the handover, and Hong Kong people are realistic. The third category is China’s influence depicted favourably (14.9 per cent), for example, a pragmatic approach being adopted when appointing Hong Kong officials, and China’s intervention in Hong Kong being mainly concerned with the economy. Similar to the Chinese media discourses a decade ago, the quoting of local people and parties remains a dominant theme.

During 2006–2008, both WMC and CMC had increased their frequencies of quoting others, which can be attributed to a growth of local political parties in both number and size, and the development of a more mature political environment (Chan and Chan 2007). Localization of political figures (Martin 2007) also means that more local Chinese people, rather than foreigners appointed from overseas, now dominate the political scene, which is likely to evoke
stronger reactions from the public. The media play an important role both in informing society of the political outlook and in constructing the identities of Hong Kong people on the political front (cf. Flowerdew 2004; Chan and Lee 2007). The presence of a mix of favourable and unfavourable views indicates that Hong Kong society has become increasingly polarized on political issues and reflects the shaping of diverse political identities, one of which is known as the post-1980s generation, by the media (cf. Fung 2001). Apart from having comparatively more quotes in this period, the number of unfavourable quotes increases over time in both Western and Chinese media discourses.

These patterns could be attributed to both increased politicalization and growing dissatisfaction in the New Hong Kong. The people of Hong Kong, who were well-known for being politically indifferent and insensitive under British rule, were compelled to take a greater interest in politics after the handover (Martin 2007). In the decade immediately after the change of sovereignty, Hong Kong had seen a number of major events with serious social and economic repercussions, most notably the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 and the epidemic of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003. Widely acclaimed for its resilience (Spiegel Online International 2007), the city nonetheless had experienced an extended period of recession, as evidenced by deflation, rising unemployment, and a massive decline in business and tourism, particularly during the SARS outbreak. Such social and economic problems led to society-wide dissatisfaction, with the government regarded as the main culprit. In other words, the enhanced political awareness and involvement of the local community after the handover are socially and economically driven. The general public participate more actively in the political arena, hoping to take social and economic matters into their own hands when their political views are directly expressed to local officials and party leaders.

CONCLUSION

By conducting a corpus-based CDS that integrates the theories and methods of CL and CDA, this study has demonstrated how the two areas of linguistic enquiry can be effectively and fruitfully combined, and the great potential of using Wmatrix and ConcGram together. Through comparing Chinese and Western media discourse, with ‘discourse’ as an abstract uncount noun denoting language use conceived as social practice (Fairclough 1995: 135), on the handover of Hong Kong across two time periods, this study has shown diachronic shifts in the way the discourses, as a count noun (Fairclough 1995: 135), signify both experiences and views in the Western perceptions of and relations with Hong Kong, from the perspectives of Western and Chinese media. The negative views about political issues and a stronger focus on the general business environment of Hong Kong in Western media discourses in 1996–1998 are found to have been replaced by an increasing emphasis on political-related issues and individual political views in the New politicalized Hong Kong in 2006–2008. For the Chinese media, change is primarily
observed in the increase in quoting Hong Kong political parties or individuals’ unfavourable views about the political situation in Hong Kong. Such changes, as reflected at the micro-level of analysis, reflect important micro-level dynamics in social, political, and ideological shifts (van Dijk 2008) not only in the identities of Hong Kong but also in the West’s (re-) positioning and (shifted) attitude towards the city and China. The findings not only give insights into the new image of Hong Kong through the eyes of the West, but also help to re-evaluate the relations and power balance between the West and China.

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NOTES
1. In this article, the West generally refers to the Americas, Europe, and Australasia, as it is quite commonly used in today’s political and cultural context.
2. The Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) is enacted in accordance with the Constitution of the PRC, the National People’s Congress, and prescribes the systems to be practised in the HKSAR, to ensure the implementation of the basic policies of the PRC regarding Hong Kong. Available from http://www.basiclaw.gov.hk/en/index/.
4. The most frequent grammatical words are excluded (47 in total).
5. A sample concordance of the concgram is provided in Table A4.

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