

# What Makes a Protest a Riot? Analyzing South China Morning Post and China Daily Framings of the 2014 and 2016 Hong Kong Protest Movements

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes news articles from both *China Daily* and *South China Morning Post* regarding the 2014 and 2016 protest movements in Hong Kong. *China Daily* frames these events as having been orchestrated by people seeking to undermine the values of Hong Kong and the strength of the PRC and thus rejects the movements. *South China Morning Post* (SCMP), on the other hand, uses a similar framing, also focusing on how the actors do not represent the majority of Hong Kong and how the movements are destroying values intrinsic to Hong Kong, but in also framing the events as having been motivated by legitimate grievances against the government (both the CCP and the local government). Therefore, SCMP paints the movements in a much more positive and sympathetic light. I employ a critical discourse analysis methodology to analyze the ways in which the news sources frame these events. This paper draws on the literature on eventing and framing of events as well as collective identities and national narratives. The purpose of this research is to analyze how both *China Daily* and SCMP report on Hong Kong's Occupy Movement in 2014 and Mong Kok movement in 2016 in order to understand how these papers frame these events and how these framings make the continuation of these contentious events possible.

**Keywords:** Hong Kong, Discourse Analysis, News Media

## 1. Introduction

The purpose of this research is to analyze how both *China Daily* and *South China Morning Post* report on Hong Kong's Occupy Movement in 2014 and Mong Kok movement in 2016 in order to understand how these events are framed and how these framings made the continuation of these contentious events possible.

This paper employs a critical discourse analysis. Building on past scholarship on ideas of framing and "eventing", as well as theories about the construction of politicized national narratives, this paper seeks to discern the ways in which these movements are portrayed by different news media outlets and how these portrayals are influenced by the past and themselves influence future portrayals.

Both *China Daily* and *South China Morning Post* represent the movements as being orchestrated by actors not representative of the majority of Hongkongers and being in opposition to the intrinsic values of Hong Kong. However, *China Daily* concludes that because of this, the movements are invalid, while *South China Morning Post*, though maintaining these base representations, also frames the events in terms of having noble goals, even if their methods are unacceptable. Therefore, these two representations, the actors are not Hongkongers, and the movements go against Hong Kong values, serve as the basis for the contentious understandings of these two movements.

This paper argues that news media is important as a medium for shaping public perceptions of events as seemingly similar representations can have vastly different conclusions based on relatively minor changes in framing.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Framing/ Eventing

The ideas of both framing and eventing are interested in the post-positivist idea that there is no objective truth of an event, and thus there is no scholarly merit in trying to discern exactly what happened at any point in time. Rather, we are interested in what Patrick Jackson calls “eventing” “the ways in which occurrences even present-day or just-recently-past occurrences, come to take on the shape that they have for us at a particular juncture in time”.<sup>1</sup> Meanings are created as these events occur, and these meanings are not fixed. Furthermore, the representations of certain events are not random, but based on the metaphors and previous understandings that a person or group holds.<sup>2</sup> They pull from ideas of the past and apply them to the present (whenever the eventing is taking place, not simply when the event itself took place). The narratives and metaphors that are already known are used to inform current events, meaning that events “have ‘historicity’- an irreducibly historical character- at the very moment of their occurrence”.<sup>3</sup> Thus, events are linked to the past through the perpetuation of and reliance on narratives, but the discourses surrounding them are always evolving, and current understandings of events are not fixed.

If eventing is the way events take shape in a particular moment, then framing is the narrative that connects these events together. Gamson and Modigliani (1987) define framing as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue”.<sup>4</sup> They guide the reader to a conclusion that the author has already come to. Frames set up the information in such a way that creates these conclusions as if they were natural. Gamson and Modigliani (1987) go on to “define a media frame as ‘a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events weaving a connection between them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue’”.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.2. Collective Identity

The literature on framing and eventing gives us an understanding of how the events are portrayed and how these portrayals are malleable, but the news does not only assign values to the events themselves, but also the actors involved. By understanding the collective identities of those involved, we can understand how they are represented. This is especially important as we get into the analysis of these news sources and find that the ways in which actors are categorized as in-group or out-group members affect how the movements are perceived. It serves many psychological functions including belongingness, distinctiveness, respect, understanding, and agency.<sup>6</sup> Most of the time, it is simply a way to relate to the world and others. Collective identity only becomes politicized when there is a struggle between groups, forcing group members to lean on an identity to overcome a power struggle.<sup>7</sup> Adam Lerner writes “individuals are more likely to think of themselves as members of social groups under conditions in which the use of a group label maximizes the similarities between oneself and other group members, and heightens one’s differences with outsider”.<sup>8</sup> Again, there is an emphasis on group identities being both a function of connecting with in-group members and distancing oneself from out-group members. This becomes especially important in the process of creating a national narrative as it necessitates the existence of an external enemy.

### 2.3. Politicized National Narratives

In their papers, Bernd Simon and Bert Klandermans (2001) and Adam Lerner describe a similar sequence through which a collective identity becomes politicized and the narratives surrounding these identities are formed. First, there is an awareness of shared grievances. This can be accomplished through the dissemination of a shared narrative that paints a certain picture of the past, through the awareness of current inequalities, or through a first-hand collective trauma. Next, an external enemy must be identified to be blamed for the grievances. Finally, claims for compensation or equality must be made, only when the demands are met can the power struggle end.<sup>9,10</sup>

Both Simon and Klandermans (2001) and Lerner place significant emphasis on the existence of both collective trauma and/or inequality and an external enemy who is blamed for this injustice.<sup>11</sup> Because these narratives are forever reimagined in the present, the historical perpetrators are now contemporary ones, even if that means the new perpetrators are uninvolved nations or younger generations.<sup>12</sup> National narratives are used to mobilize a group, often with violent intent, and avoid criticism for past or present acts by relying on sympathy to avoid scrutiny.<sup>13</sup> Lerner also argues that victims can also turn their collective trauma towards activism, rather than perpetuating the victimization, actively seeking

retribution and justice for those who wronged them. While a victimhood narrative perpetuates the feelings of loss, this kind of narrative is one of empowerment. Through the creation of a national narrative, the state is able to unite its people by making a “unity out of difference”.

## 2.4. Historical Context and National Narratives

The clashes between Hong Kong and the mainland have roots in the histories of both areas. The differing representations of current events draw from the national narratives of both areas, which, as the scholars highlighted earlier note, are politicized understandings of past grievances and enemies.

Throughout mainland Chinese history leading up to the pre-modern period, China was one of, if not the, most powerful nation in Asia and maintained a certain level of control over other Asian nations. Yet, this changed with the Opium Wars, during which Hong Kong was ceded to the British in the Treaty of Nanking in 1842. This event not only came to symbolize the start of the so called “century of humiliation”, but was also the moment Hong Kong became symbolically important to the mainland. Lerner would describe this as a victimhood narrative, as it is largely passive and used to both avoid scrutiny and elicit sympathy.

After a hundred years of loss of sovereignty and land, Beijing sees regaining control of ceded and occupied areas as pivotal to their return to prominence. In this narrative, Hong Kong is a tangible representation of both the loss and restoration of power. For example, the phrase “washing away 100 years of national humiliation” (洗百年国耻) was often used in reference to Hong Kong’s 1997 return to China, unsubtly asserting that this moment ended the era.<sup>14</sup>

Following Simon and Klandermans’s path to politicized collective identity as outlined above, we can see how the Chinese politicized collective identity was formed. First, the identification of grievances: at its core, the CCP’s narrative is that of a great nation defeated in 100 years of continuous war. The next step is identifying the enemy, the other, who caused these grievances. Imperialist powers have long been seen as the ones to blame for China’s suffering. The third step is to demand compensation, in this case regaining (and maintain) control over Hong Kong, causing Hong Kong to become a powerful symbol of the return to glory and the defeat of imperial influence.

Hong Kong, on the other hand, while also having suffered a collective trauma, did not create a victimization narrative, but rather one of actively demanding redress. Hong Kong had its own economic rise much earlier than the mainland and did not experience those hundred years in the same way the mainland did. Hong Kong was a colony of Britain for 154 years (barring Japanese occupation from 1941-1945), this constitutes the collective trauma. Many in Hong Kong understand their story as the evolution from a small fishing village to a booming metropolis, of a diligent and intelligent people with the strength to stand up against not only British colonialism, but also Beijing’s intimidation.<sup>15</sup> While the mainland rejoiced on July 1, 1997 when Hong Kong was officially returned, many in Hong Kong met the day with fear and apprehension.<sup>16</sup> Many saw the handover as a deal between Britain and China that they had no say in and did not necessarily agree to.<sup>17</sup> Flowerdew (2004) sums up what happened on that day as “decolonization without independence, or, in the words of the Chinese leader at that time, Deng Xiaoping, “one country, two systems.””<sup>18</sup> This sense of never being free is at the core of the contemporary Hong Kong narrative and caused the mainland to become the enemy of this narrative. Unlike the PRC, who was able to forge their own future in overcoming imperialism, Hong Kong has never been able to gain autonomy and independence to shape their own future, and thus continues to seek that to this day.

## 3. Methodology

This paper employs a critical discourse analysis methodology as this paper is not concerned with discerning the truth of what occurred in a positivist sense, but rather the ways in which the events are portrayed and what becomes possible as a result. As Dianna Mullet (2018) writes, “CDA rests on the notion that the way we use language is purposeful, regardless of whether discursive choices are conscious or unconscious.”<sup>19</sup> This allows us to assume that words and themes are chosen with a purpose, and that people and groups discuss events in deliberate ways in order to provoke certain reactions. Furthermore, discourse analysis allows us to understand human perceptions of the world as mediated through negotiations over what is seen/understood. The role of the researcher here is to show what representations, which are understood as things and phenomena as filtered through the way people perceive them, are given and what that shows us about the ways authors understand events. Therefore, discourse analysis allows us to see our perceptions of events as having been shaped by the discourses we are exposed to. We are at the center of a negotiation over how the world should be seen, and no perception represents the empirical truth.

Furthermore, CDA allows us to make empirical claims about discourses and causality. Howard and Stavrakakis (2000) write that discourse can be conceptualized as frames which are “primarily instrumental devices that can foster common

perceptions and understandings for specific purposes".<sup>20</sup> Again, there is an emphasis on intentionality and deliberateness of word and phrase choice which create understandings of events capable of influencing readers. For this project, we can understand the framings presented by these newspapers as having been deliberately (though perhaps unconsciously) chosen in order to create particular understandings of the events.

### 3.1. Data Sources

Newspapers were chosen as they have a unique power to influence public perception because, unlike political sources which may only be seen by those within political circles, most people are exposed to the news in one way or another. *China Daily* and *South China Morning Post* were chosen because both papers are published both domestically and internationally, as well as representing both the hegemonic and counter hegemonic discourses.

*China Daily* is owned by the Publicity Department of the Communist Party of China and is published in both English and Chinese. It was established on June 1, 1981, and currently published both domestically and internationally, boasting over 200 million international readers.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, *South China Morning Post* is an internationally distributed publication written entirely in English and published out of Hong Kong (and currently blocked in the mainland). According to a poll done by the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey for the Chinese University in Hong Kong from 1997 to 2019, SCMP was consistently considered the most credible paid newspaper in Hong Kong.<sup>22</sup> In 2015, it was announced that SCMP would be bought by major Chinese conglomerate Alibaba, spiking fears that SCMP, which had been hailed as being in opposition to state run media, would come under the influence of the CCP.<sup>23</sup> Jack Ma, owner of Alibaba, said the decision was motivated by the hope to present a less biased view of China than what was traditionally seen in western media.<sup>24</sup> While I believe it would be naïve to say the CCP has absolutely no say in the content of this paper, I would argue that the continued high praise in Hong Kong and around the world as well as the fact that the CCP has blocked its distribution within the mainland shows that SCMP maintains a high level of autonomy and power to criticize the PRC.

In terms of specific sources, I am examining articles from September 26, 2014 through January 1, 2015, for the 2014 movement, and from February 8 through March 31, 2016, for the 2016 movement. These dates were chosen because they allow for analysis of the events themselves and the immediate aftermath. The 2014 movement lasted from September 26, 2014 – December 15, 2014, while the 2016 movements lasted from Feb 8, 2016 – Feb 9, 2016. All sources were found through Factiva using the search terms Hong Kong AND Mong Kok, or Hong Kong AND Umbrella and filtered through only Hong Kong Region sources. Only English language sources were analyzed.

As *China Daily* is fully funded by the CCP the narratives portrayed in this paper constitute the hegemonic discourse. Furthermore, by having an official English-language version, this paper impacts both domestic and international opinions. The counter-hegemonic discourses are represented through *South China Morning Post*. While SCMP does not come directly from the mouths of those involved in the movements, it is the paper which has the most international influence while still being published out of Hong Kong.

It should be noted, however, that in terms of this research the lines between hegemonic and counterhegemonic discourses are blurred. This is due largely to the use of English-language sources, which places the emphasis on the international, English speaking audiences, rather than domestic audience. Much of the West, and in particular the US, have sided with activists in Hong Kong over the political elites, due in large part to tensions between the PRC and western powers. This means that the voices of Hongkongers, in this case SCMP, are privileged and respected in parts of the world over those of the CCP. Therefore, each side has the power to shape the perceptions of different audiences. *China Daily* has more domestic power, while SCMP has more power internationally, generally speaking. Therefore, these papers are interesting as they each have more authority in swaying different audiences.

One point that should be made in reference to the reflexivity of this project and my own relationship with the subject matter is the fact that as an American college student, I have been educated in a context which privileges US understandings of the relationship between Hong Kong and the mainland, which differ from domestic understandings. Furthermore, while not as significant as it would have been if I had been working with research participants, my position as an American student with little to no personal connection to these events means that there are nuances and intricacies to these issues which I am not privy to.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1. Contemporary Context: 2014 and 2016

Hong Kong's 2014 movement, most commonly referred to as the Occupy Central Movement or the Umbrella Protest, was a call for genuine universal suffrage. The protests lasted from September 28 through December 15, 2014. The goal was to occupy parts of the business district to pressure Beijing into allowing Hongkongers the right to select the Chief Executive.<sup>25</sup> On August 31, 2014, the Standing Committee of China's legislature, the National People's Congress ruled that any candidate for Chief Executive would have to be backed by an election committee which was majority Beijing loyalists.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the Chief Executive-elect must be appointed by the Central People's Government.<sup>27</sup> This was seen as not following through with democratic reforms as promised in the Sino-British Joint Treaty. Occupy ultimately did not result in any moves towards democracy. However, it was the first major protest movement in Hong Kong and led to the rise of localism, pro-democracy and independence groups.

The 2016 movement, most commonly referred to as the Mong Kok Riot, Mong Kok Civil Unrest, or the Fishball Revolution began on Lunar New Year, February 8, 2016, and lasted through the night until the 9<sup>th</sup>. The movement was motivated by the government's decision to ban food vendors in Mong Kok, and was in many ways an extension of previous protests, with many groups, including Hong Kong Indigenous<sup>28</sup>, calling for more radical action.<sup>29</sup> Tensions came to a climax after police used pepper spray and batons to control the crowds, which led to retaliation. This movement exposed the building tensions between localism and indigenous groups and police and government officials and brought attention to the demands of these groups.

This paper will focus on the framings of: actors are not Hongkongers, and the movement goes against what Hong Kong is, as they are ideas which can be seen across the two newspapers and across the two events. We will also explore the idea that the government is at fault/there are legitimate grievances which is only seen in SCMP sources.

### 4.2. Actors are not Hongkongers, 2014, Foreign Conspiracy and Waning Support

In 2014, the argument made by *China Daily* surrounded the idea that the movement had been orchestrated by foreign powers seeking to undermine China's growth and sow the seeds of discontent throughout Hong Kong. This betrays a continued resentment towards foreign powers and the West in particular. This is best illustrated in this excerpt from an article which posits the theory that there is a group scheming to undermine "Chinese sovereignty in Hong Kong under the 'One Country, Two Systems' principle".

In a Land Destroyer Report, Tony Cartalucci revealed details of a secret meeting which two opposition leaders from Hong Kong - Martin Lee and Anson Chan - held at the NED [National Endowment for Democracy]. There, they confided that the true aim of the "Occupy" movement, planned from as early as April 2013, was to use Hong Kong as a base to "infect" China with its Western-style institutions, laws and interests.<sup>30</sup>

The argument, articulated through this article and others, of a foreign conspiracy plays on the notion of the West as a power to be overcome and one with the power to harm China. This assertion that the West is "infecting" the PRC relies on already understood notions of western intervention into China which began during the Opium Wars, during which time Hong Kong was ceded to the British. This article also asserts that the West is manipulating those in Hong Kong in order to bring western institutions in and pressure Beijing into accepting them.

With this knowledge of what he terms a "foreign-driven agenda," Cartalucci concludes that the "Occupy" movement "has nothing to do with democracy", but is "abusing democracy to undermine Beijing's control over Hong Kong, and (designed to) open the door to candidates that clearly serve foreign interests, not those of China, or even the people of Hong Kong."<sup>31</sup>

Here, ideas of democracy are dismissed and painted as a mask which these schemers hide behind. Rather than engaging with the inequalities and tensions which led to the movement, *China Daily* makes claims of outside intervention and appeals to the national victimhood narrative in order to elicit sympathy and support not just within the mainland, but in also Hong Kong and internationally. Hong Kong and the mainland are now allies in a fight against foreign intervention that seeks to destroy them both.

This idea of a foreign conspiracy was unique to the *China Daily* representation, SCMP maintained that the movement came from within Hong Kong, but claimed that those involved were not representative of the majority.

A new poll showed that nearly 70 per cent of the public wants the movement to end.

For the first time since it started the poll in September, Chinese University found more people opposed the Occupy movement than supported it. Of the 1,030 respondents, 43 per cent were against and 34 per cent for the movement – indicating a shift in public sentiment.

Even those who supported the democracy protests believed it was time to bring it to an end. About 67 per cent of all respondents said protesters should go home.<sup>32</sup>

Here, SCMP is not outright saying that the movement had no support, or was wrong, rather that at this point the movement needed to come to an end due to waning support. Until this point, SCMP had been very much in support of the movement, calling the protesters “good-natured and peaceful” in early October, while still fearing the movement may be “hijacked by radicals” and turn violent.<sup>33</sup> This seems to be the point where the public can no longer support the movement, even if they supported their goals, as is made more obvious in the next excerpt.

Financial Secretary John Tsang Chun-wah in his weekly blog urged the protesters to stop their movement now or risk “losing the moral high ground”.

“It is time to return to rationality ... They should first convince the rest of Hong Kong people with their arguments,” he wrote.<sup>34</sup>

A major point in SCMP articles is not that Occupy as a whole was wrong or misguided, but rather that there was a point when continuing the movement is no longer in their best interest. Here, those involved in the movement are not portrayed as outsiders in the same way they are in the *China Daily* articles, but rather as taking actions which are not supported by the majority of people, and thus not being representative of the people at large.

#### 4.2.1. Actors are Not Hongkongers, 2016, Terrorism and Violence

SCMP portrayed the 2016 movement in an overall less positive light than the Occupy Movement, largely due to the violence in 2016 as opposed to the largely peaceful 2014 movement. We can understand SCMP’s framing of the events in Mong Kok as the unfortunate and unsupportable escalation to violence by a group whose goals are not the point of contention, but rather their methods, as seen in the passage below.

[Ray] Wong shunned the milder approach adopted by the pan-democratic camp and groups like the Federation of Students and Scholarism.

He co-founded localist group Hong Kong Indigenous in January last year, with the creed of “separation between Hong Kong and China” as well as “using force in resistance”.

The group holds an anti-mainland dogma, believing that the influx of mainland immigrants would undermine local culture and lead to abuse of the city’s welfare system. It advocates for the Hongkongers’ right to self-determination.<sup>35</sup>

Much of this article is written with little obvious bias towards or against Wong. While not going so far as to agree with them, this article argues that there is logic behind Wong and his group. Rather than crazy radicals trying to harm Hong Kong, they are rational actors trying to help the city they love. I believe that the distanced tone in this article shows that, in the eyes of SCMP, the goals of Hong Kong Indigenous are not the issue, but rather their use of violence, just as they were largely in support of Occupy until clashes with the police began. However, while there remains an undercurrent of sympathy for their goals, SCMP articles are not all so kind to those involved.

Hong Kong’s innocence has died. It departed this earth in the early hours of the second day of the Year of the Monkey with a sickening thud as a brick thrown by a rioter hit the body of a police officer. Bit by bit, in the subsequent hail of footpath paving, glass bottles, wood and whatever else came to the hands of the mob, it was dismembered until it was no longer recognisable. All that remains of it now resides in our memories. Beijing’s top official in Hong Kong brands Mong Kok rioters ‘radical separatists inclined to terrorism’... How such people came about in a city that prides itself on being tolerant, safe and law-abiding mystifies me. For all the gripes about politics, housing, job opportunities

and inequality, it can't be denied that what Hong Kong provides is reasonable when compared to other societies.<sup>36</sup>

This article emphasizes the destruction the movement caused. Those involved are not heroes, but criminals and rioters who cannot represent the people of Hong Kong, not matter how valiant their motives. The phrase “radical separatists inclined to terrorism” is a reference to a speech given by Zhang Xiaoming, director of the Central People's Government Liaison Office in Hong Kong, in which he condemned the movement and those involved as radical separatists.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the assertion that Hong Kong's innocence was killed by the movement further alienates the movement from the “regular” people of Hong Kong. While this article does acknowledge the inequalities within Hong Kong, which have been pointed out by other articles as reasons for the movement, it quickly dismisses them as not as bad as the situation in other places, and not warranting the kind of response it got. Their goals, again, are not the issue, nor is the movement as a whole, but rather the choice to engage in violence, which goes against the implicit understanding of how Hong Kongers should act. In order to engage in what SCMP sees as acceptable conduct, one must take peaceful measures, not violent ones.

*China Daily* stays firm to the idea that the 2016 movement is the pre-planned work of radicals trying to undermine the values that hold Hong Kong together. The goals and grievances given by the participants can be understood as a way to manipulate ordinary Hongkongers into agreeing with and join the cause in order to cause more harm, rather than the actual articulation of the needs of the people at large.

The Lunar New Year is the most important traditional festival for the Chinese. Family members celebrate together and hope for a promising new year ahead. However, on the very first day of Chinese New Year, violent protesters greatly tarnished the festive atmosphere with bricks and violence.

This violence was started by members of Hong Kong Indigenous, a radical political group. It is not hard for any sensible person to realize that the justifications they used of protecting unlicensed hawkers from the police crackdown were just an excuse to hide their real motives.<sup>38</sup>

Here it is made clear that Hong Kong Indigenous are radicals whose goals are not about protecting hawkers, but causing chaos, which is set in opposition to the goals of regular Hongkongers. By highlighting the New Year as a time of happiness and hope, the events that took place are portrayed as counter to the norm and what is good.

[Some politicians and academics] even want the public to believe the young people involved were coerced into becoming rioters by contempt for the state of governance in Hong Kong.

But is this true? Is there anyone who is really threatening them? Can violence be justified as it often is in the movies and video games which teenagers watch and play so much nowadays? Do they even understand what they are doing when they riot and protest so violently? Are they really becoming the heroes they believe in? These are questions more people in Hong Kong need to think carefully about. Viewed from any perspective, the Mong Kok riot was a deliberately planned and illegal act. It should therefore be condemned by every responsible person in Hong Kong.<sup>39</sup>

Here, the idea that the clash was motivated by political criticisms is dismissed swiftly by implying that there are no threats against those involved and focusing the idea of violence being unjustifiable, and arguing that those involved do not understand their own actions. By saying that reasonable people will condemn the movement, those unsure of where they stand are forced to make a choice whether to remain reasonable or turn to radicalism. There is an element of shaming throughout this article which may influence less convinced supporters to turn against the movement. It also asserts that those involved are not rational actors, but kids who do not understand their actions or what Hongkongers really need. Here, Hong Kong is defined as a civilized place with a strong rule of law, which is consistent with other articles. There is nothing inherent about this categorization, they were chosen to be deliberately in opposition with the actions of those involved in order to influencing opinions and deny the movement support.

#### 4.3. Movement Goes Against Hong Kong Values, 2014, Peace and Rule of Law Must be Upheld

The framing of the actors as not being Hongkongers is made even more effective when not only them, but their actions as well are portrayed as antithetical to what Hong Kong is. By attaching values to Hong Kong with which everyone can agree, those who are in violation of these values can be swiftly punished. While it may seem obvious that rule of law and peace would be valued, we must also consider that for many, freedom of speech and assembly are seen as inherent

values of Hong Kong. If these are the values which are emphasized, then a large-scale movement as was seen in 2014 is very much justified and keeps with the values of Hong Kong. Therefore, assigning values to Hong Kong which contrast with the acts being reported on allows for these acts to be seen as immoral.

In particular, an SCMP article published the day the original organizers turned themselves in conveys a sense that the ideas and hopes of the movement were originally in line with Hong Kong values and to be respected, but that over time there was a shift. It writes, “However lofty the goal, Occupy has not brought us closer to democracy. Instead of being civilised and peaceful, the protests were marred by scuffles and clashes.”<sup>40</sup> Here, the emphasis is put on the shift in the movement from peaceful sit-ins to the increasingly disruptive and violent actions attributed to the student organizations. While the goals are seen as less than realistic, they are still admirable. The real sticking point is how what was meant to be a movement based on “peace and love” turned into boycotts, blockades, and clashes. The movement should, therefore, come to an end as it has been ineffective and, ultimately, bringing more harm than good. It is stated explicitly in this article and many others that “Hong Kong is built on rule law”, therefore actions that go against the rule of law are tantamount to destabilizing the very foundation of the city.<sup>41</sup> The idea that the campaign is out of control further emphasizes that there has been a shift. The violence and illegal actions have turned a once respected and even admirable movement into something that can no longer be accepted.

This *China Daily* article emphasizes this idea that the movement has sought to ruin a fundamental aspect of Hong Kong. There is a sense of intent here that is notably absent in the SCMP article.

The protesters are getting what they want. They have torn society apart by asking everyone to take sides. In the process, friends have become enemies. They have discredited the police, one of the few remaining groups which normally command everyone's respect. We treasure Hong Kong as a place with the rule of law. But the occupiers are ensuring this is not the case. What good does all this do? It is clear that the occupiers are fulfilling their own prophecy. They are creating a situation where a crackdown may become inevitable. This will provide further evidence that our government is "authoritarian" and the police are "brutal". The negativity will keep reinforcing itself, if we do not make radical changes to the environment that breeds this nonsense.<sup>42</sup>

Those involved are deliberately undermining the rule of law and “have torn society apart”, thus harming the very unity of Hong Kong and forcing people to take sides. The use of “we” and “they” is also interesting, “they have torn society apart”, “we treasure Hong Kong”, this article is clearly crafting an us vs. them narrative which sets “us” on the side of protecting Hong Kong and its values, and “them” as the opposition, destroying these values. The idea that the occupiers are crafting their own narrative is also important. This article argues that by ensuring a police crackdown, those involved are furthering their own narrative about government, thus proving that they were right all along. This is important because it frames the destruction of Hong Kong values as not only a byproduct of the movement, but a deliberate strategy. “They” are deliberately harming “our” city to further their own agenda, and we have to make radical changes to stop them. It is also interesting to note that this was not the first time there was a call for changes to the education system, in 2012, the CCP attempted to establish the moral and national education curriculum in Hong Kong, but was never established, partially due to the backlash from many groups in Hong Kong, notably Scholarism, who came to the forefront in 2014. This call for educational reform may be a call back to the last time this group clashed with the government. This article also stresses the importance of adhering to the laws, namely the Basic Laws, and how the movement has not done that, thus is not following the legal, and agreed upon code of conduct of Hong Kong.

#### 4.3.1 The Movement Goes Against Hong Kong Values, 2016, Rule of Law vs. Violence

The excerpt from SCMP below emphasizes ideas of what makes Hong Kong “great” in contrast with what happened on the Lunar New Year 2016. In particular, it emphasizes not just what Hong Kong’s core values are, but also what Lunar New Year represents, and sets them in contrast with what was seen on that day.

[“Appreciate Hong Kong”] Slogans may or may not work, but this particular Lunar New Year should have made many realise better what we need to treasure so as to really appreciate our city - our fine tradition of respecting the rule of law. We were all shocked at what happened in Mong Kok on the first night of the Year of the Monkey, and any sensible person would agree that, whatever the reason, violence should not be in Hong Kong's DNA...[Lam] aims to instill positive energy by encouraging people to remember the good things about Hong Kong - "a beautiful, energetic, caring and efficient city, and a home which belongs to us"<sup>43</sup>

Here, the reasoning for the events is left unexplored, they are simply painted as unacceptable. The description of Hong Kong as “a beautiful, energetic, caring and efficient city” is very important. This is a strikingly similar representation to the one given by *China Daily* and once again contrast what Hong Kong is ‘meant’ to be with the violence that took place on the New Year, a joyous holiday. Additionally, the emphasis on Hong Kong being “a home which belongs to us” could have been used to show why protests are necessary, as one has the right to choose how their home looks and it is their duty to take action to make it better, but here this phrase is used to argue for maintaining the status quo as that is seen as the safe way to live. The movement is portrayed as going against what makes Hong Kong so great, and is even able to change the fundamental character of the city.

[T]he Mong Kok riot served as a timely warning to all: what Hong Kong has today is not to be taken for granted. When the rule of law is undermined, its value is diminished. Its beauty, efficiency, and vibrancy will fade away... The rioters cannot represent this city. Hong Kong is never perfect, what with so many deep-rooted political and social problems, but it still remains a lively and friendly city that is well worth appreciating<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, this article sets itself apart from *China Daily* articles in that there is acknowledgement that there are social and political issues which motivated the event, a framing which is consistent throughout the SCMP articles in 2014. However, the emphasis on the power of violence to destroy Hong Kong is still there. Breaking the law has the power to cause the “beauty, efficiency, and vibrancy” of the rule of law to “fade away”, and thus Hong Kong with it. Thus, SCMP maintains the argument that there are legitimate reasons for the movement, but that even those cannot justify the use of violence.

This excerpt from a *China Daily* article discusses the outcome of the February elections and the unanticipated success of Edward Leung, the spokesperson for Hong Kong Indigenous who had been arrested on February 8th. This article clearly sets the goals of this group in contrast with the goals of Hong Kong.

In a civilized society, no rational citizen will tolerate rioters and trust those who have no scruples when it comes to pursuing their political aspirations. Hong Kong is a civilized society under the rule of law, and Hong Kong residents are peace-loving people. It is disappointing and disturbing that some 66,000 voters voted for a candidate [Leung] who advocates the use of violence and promotes radical localism. Winning 15.4 percent of all valid votes in the February by-election has boosted the ambitions of the young “localist” and his radical team.<sup>45</sup>

This excerpt emphasizes the importance of rule of law and that “Hong Kong residents are peace loving”. These representations are consistent with those in the SCMP article above and thus show a common theme, that rule of law and peace are vital to Hong Kong and its people. These values are set in opposition to those of Edward Leung, and by extension Hong Kong Indigenous, and the movement as a whole.

The fact that Leung won approximately 15% of the votes can be, generally speaking, framed in one of two ways, either it shows that his movement is gaining traction and that there are some who are truly feeling represented by it, or it shows that there is something wrong and concerning about those who voted that way. This article is obviously of the second opinion, that Leung and his supporters are in opposition to the ideals of a civilized society and are represented and supported by “radicals and separatists”, or at least those sympathetic to these kinds of people. While this article focuses on the elections more than the movement directly, there is still a strong emphasis on the juxtaposition between what is expected of Hong Kong, peace and rule of law, and what happened, violence and radicalism.

#### 4.4. The Government is at Fault: Legitimate Grievances

This is an idea seen only in the SCMP framing, but seen in both the 2014 and 2016 articles. It is centered on the idea that there are issues within Hong Kong and between Hong Kong and the PRC that led to these movements. While it has been brought up in discussing previous articles, it bears repeating and emphasizing that the SCMP framings, while following a similar format to *China Daily* ones, contain this added level of nuance which changes the overarching representations of these movements from unequivocal rejection, to tentative support. This article, written October 21, 2014, brings up these ideas in the context of Hong Kong’s history and relationship with the mainland.

Many Hongkongers fear the city's diverse culture has been eroded in exchange for economic growth, indirectly assimilating it into the People's Republic and slowly losing its unique values. Protection of Hong Kong's identity is the focal point for many protesters...Support for the Occupy movement

comes from many years of built-up frustration about high property prices, the fear of growing censorship and a loss of press freedom, and the overflow of mainland tourists. Some people now conclude that drastic change is needed.<sup>46</sup>

This article makes two important points about the government's role in the movement, one, that there are government's policies and practices, mainly the emphasis on the economy over the welfare and happiness of the people of Hong Kong, and two, that there needs to be open communication between Hong Kong and the mainland. This article asserts that the movement is a natural response to the realities of living in Hong Kong and the fears that many feel. Three causes of the Occupy movement are brought up, "the fear of growing censorship and a loss of press freedom, and the overflow of mainland tourists". The solution presented is a clear diversion from the solutions brought up in the *China Daily* articles seen earlier, who called for putting down the movement, here, although they both frame the movement. The excerpt below again calls out the importance of the criticisms that were not addressed in 2014 that spilled over into 2016. It should be remembered that at the time of the Mong Kok movement, Occupy had only ended just over a year ago and thus the tensions and disappointments were still fresh.

"All these problems and dissatisfaction remained unresolved after the Umbrella Movement, but the government has not taken any initiative to address them, if not making the situation worse," he said. "The hawkers issue is not anything new and is just a contingent factor which triggers such huge protests."

[Professor Stephen Chan Ching-kiu] said Hong Kong Indigenous could neither represent young people nor those who backed localism. "But if the government ... refuses to address the root of the problems, the groups which advocate violent protests might win further support as Hongkongers see no way out."<sup>47</sup>

Again, the government's handling of the events is portrayed as doing nothing to alleviate the struggles of the Hong Kong people. Hong Kong Indigenous is still framed as not representing the majority of Hongkongers, but their complaints are the same as the people, and thus cannot be outright condemned. Their actions are unacceptable, but there is rationality and legitimacy to them.

SCMP makes it clear that the underlying causes are legitimate, and in the case of 2014, there is support for the movement, up until the point when it turns violent, at which point the means no longer justify the end. Perhaps the rule of law and peacefulness are more important than ideas of universal suffrage and democracy. The key difference here then, is that while *China Daily* argues that because the movements represent neither the Hong Kong people nor their values, the movements are not to be engaged with and their causes are not to be looked into. SCMP, on the other hand agrees, with the first two points but argues that there are motives for the movement which are important, and there is the possibility of a legitimate, successful movement in the future, 2014 and 2016 just were not that.

## 5. Conclusion

There is no objective truth of events, what we see and understand is based on our biases and the biases of those we identify with and trust. Neither of these papers shows us the truth of events and neither is more accurate. Much more than telling us what happened, these news sources tell us how these two groups, who, generally speaking, represent opposite sides of this struggle, understand these movements. Just as those protesting and fighting on the ground create the discourse surrounding these events, so too do the news sources that report on them. What will come of the protest movements is yet to be seen, but we can see how they might be framed, and with that, what understandings and policies become possible. Someone who saw these two events only through the lens of the framings from one of these papers would have a vastly different perception of the events from someone who read only the other paper.

By and large, the framings were the same. They both portrayed the movements as alien to both the Hong Kong people and the spirit of Hong Kong, yet just by reading the articles, it is clear that their overarching framings are different. What changed is that *South China Morning Post* did not stop at invalidating the movements, the overarching perception from SCMP is that the actions of a few are wrong, but the goals of the movements are admirable. These ideas about what it means to be a Hongkonger and what Hong Kong is are important to both sides, and they are in agreement about the importance of peace and rule of law, yet differ widely on whether the motives behind the movements should even be heard.

The tensions from these movements have continued through to the 2019/2020 movement and it is very likely that tensions will flare again and another movement will begin. Furthermore, the more the PRC comes under international

scrutiny, the more likely they are to continue leaning on the national victimhood narrative and thus placing more and more importance on Hong Kong as a symbol of this narrative. This could lead to an even more tense relationship as the PRC attempts to maintain control over the city, meaning that these understandings will continue to perpetuate themselves, thus it is important to understand the basis of these contentious events in order to understand their future.

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## 7. End Notes

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