# Discursive Constructions of the 2019 Hong Kong Protests in *CNN* and *China Daily*: A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Study

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## Abstract

Using corpus-assisted discourse analysis, this study examines the differences in the discursive constructions of the 2019 Hong Kong protests by two globally influential American and Chinese English-language media outlets, namely *CNN* and *China Daily*. The findings reveal that *CNN* constructed the protests as a largely youth-driven democratic struggle, drawing comparisons with the previous Umbrella Movement, and highlighting the incidences of police repression. In contrast, *China Daily* constructed the protests negatively, portraying it as an unlawful and disruptive phenomenon undermining Hong Kong's rule of law and economic stability, and highlighting the unlawful and violent behavior of the protesters. This study not only reveals the contrasting ideological stances of these media outlets in portraying an event that captures global attention, but also provides insight into the role of mainstream Chinese media in supporting China's arduous bid to influence global opinion favorable to its undertakings.

## Introduction

This study is concerned with the discursive constructions of the 2019 Hong Kong protests in *CNN* and *China Daily*. Given its unique status as China's Special Administrative Region with guaranteed autonomy, Hong Kong's political crisis in the period of China's expanding influence has immediately captured global attention. As a result, the city has once again become the focus of global news coverage since the so-called Umbrella Movement hit the headlines in 2014. The latest developments about the protests are extensively monitored and reported in the Western media which continues to dominate the global news flow (Heng, 2015). Currently, the Chinese government strives to challenge this hegemony as its state-run media outlets gradually enter the realm of global media to spread the Communist Party's world view (Gunia, 2019). Alongside with this internationalization, the telling of "China's story" or promoting its positive image to the world is the key mission of these media outlets as laid down by Chinese President Xi Jinping (Baijie, 2018). Thus, it is equally important to explore how the events of global significance transpiring within China's territorial jurisdiction are framed in the Chinese media.

In February 2019, the Hong Kong government announced its intention to pass a bill amending the Fugitive Offenders Ordinance and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Ordinance. This proposal originated from a 2018 murder case in Taiwan involving two Hong Kong nationals. Poon Hiu-wing was killed while spending a vacation with her boyfriend, Chan Tong-kai, who eventually confessed to his crime (Everington, 2018). However, Hong Kong authorities were unable to charge Chan with murder in local courts or extradite him to Taiwan due to the lack of a formal agreement (Siu, 2019). Because of the legal loopholes claimed by the Hong Kong government, the bill was crafted to allow the surrender of fugitives to countries where it lacks bilateral extradition agreements (Cheung, Lum, & Kang-Chung, 2019).

The government's proposal to pass an extradition bill triggered a series of mass protests in Hong Kong. Various civil society groups and lawmakers contend that the bill would further erode Hong Kong's legal independence from

mainland China despite the "one country, two systems" framework (Pomfret & Master, 2019). Critics of the bill fear the prospect of allowing the Chinese government to extradite suspects from Hong Kong which could be used against political dissidents, particularly that China is known for its partisan legal system (Pei, 2019). Despite Hong Kong's Chief Executive Carrie Lam's pronouncement that the bill is "dead" to ease the tensions, the protesters continued to demand the bill's full withdrawal in the legislature (Sun, 2019). The Chinese government, on the other hand, has vowed full support for Hong Kong's embattled leader (Mai, 2019). After months of unrests, Lam eventually decided to formally withdraw the bill on September 4.

This study utilizes a corpus-assisted discourse analysis in examining the articles about the protests published by *CNN* and *China Daily*. A combination of corpus linguistics analytical techniques, namely keyword analysis, collocations, and concordance searches, were employed to reveal the differences in the discourses constructed by these two globally influential US- and China-based English-language media outlets.

## Media Discourses

The media is one of the primary circulators of discourses in society (Gauntlett, 2002). Because of its omnipresence and accessibility, information about the world is normally gathered by the people through the media. Over the past decades, the development of digital technologies, such as personal computers, tablets, and smartphones, has further enabled the media to penetrate the people's daily activities (Delfanti & Arvidsson, 2019). Especially in today's world, newspaper contents and TV news broadcasts are readily accessible in the media outlets' websites and other social networking sites for public consumption.

The information about the world is presented by the media through representations. This pertains to the process in which the media presents the reality in particular versions rather than providing a neutral or unbiased account of the world (Barker & Jane, 2016; Hodkinson, 2011). Kellner & Share (2007, p. 12) argues that the "media do not present reality like transparent windows or simple reflection of the world because media messages are created, shaped, and positioned through a construction process". Thus, what media presents to the audience is a "construction of reality rather than a picture of reality" (Whitney, Sumpter, & McQuail, 2004, p. 402). This premise denotes that the news reports produced by media outlets are systematically constructed through a highly selective, if not biased, presentation of events based on newsworthiness and importance to the audience. Despite the public reliance on the media being widely regarded as an impartial source of information, the facts which it claims to present are not value-free (Fowler, 1991). Furthermore, news construction is strongly entangled with the media outlets' ideological stances (Fairclough, 1995; Fowler, 1991). The articulation of such stances is neither unconscious nor spontaneous; rather, it rests on what Richardson (2007, p. 38) explains as "the result of [the journalist's] choice – the choice to use one way of describing a person, an action or a process over another; the choice to use one way of constructing a sentence over an alternative; the choice to include a particular fact or opinion or argument over another, etc.".

As a social institution, the media holds power in shaping public opinion due to its huge audience size as well as its capacity to influence a certain discourse. The sheer repetition of ideologies implicitly articulated by media outlets has a considerable impact on their audiences, specifically on how they view certain aspects of reality. Kress & Hodge (1979, p. 6) claim that "language is an instrument of control as well as communication". These audiences can, therefore, be both informed and manipulated by the messages they consume from the media. Thus, appraising the "manufactured" media discourse has been a major preoccupation of discourse analysis (O'Keeffe,

2012, p. 441). Given the said considerations about media discourses, this study aims to address the following research questions:

1. How do *CNN* and *China Daily* differ in terms of their discursive constructions of the 2019 Hong Kong protests?

2. How do their discursive construction of the protests manifest in the way they portrayed its two key opposing social actors, namely the Hong Kong police and the protesters opposing the extradition bill?

## Corpus-Assisted Approach to Discourse Analysis

A major criticism raised against discourse analysis is the tendency to cherry-pick the data that suits the interest of the researcher (Machin & Mayr, 2012), thereby making it difficult to generalize study results. To address such criticism, this study employs a corpus-assisted approach to discourse analysis. It uses large collections of texts which are compiled and analyzed electronically to uncover dominant linguistic patterns in discourse construction (Baker, 2006). One reason why media discourse is becoming more attractive to discourse analysts is due to the online presence of media outlets (O'Keeffe, 2012). Such presence makes the data collection relatively efficient and easier. Together with this development, the proliferation of corpus analysis software has made the corpus-assisted approach a viable option in examining media discourse.

In his book *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*, Baker (2006) enumerates some advantages of utilizing a corpus-assisted approach to discourse analysis. First, it helps reduce researcher bias. He underscored improbability of focusing on a single article if the researcher is working on a corpus where general trends and patterns can be discerned. Using a corpus can guarantee that "the data itself has not been selected in order to confirm existing conscious (or subconscious) biases" (Baker, 2006, p. 12). Second, it helps reveal incremental effects of discourse, especially that the "task of discourse analysts is to uncover how language is employed, often in quite subtle ways, to reveal underlying discourse" (Baker, 2006, p. 13). Relying on a single article is insignificant; however, by using a corpus, the discourse analysts can reveal how the producers of texts can "manipulate us by suggesting to us what is 'common-sense' or 'accepted wisdom'" (Baker, 2006, p. 13). Furthermore, aside from identifying specific dominant discourses through repeated patterns of language use, a corpus-assisted approach can also help identify "the presence of counter-examples which are much less likely to be uncovered via smaller-scale studies" (Baker, 2006, p. 14).

Over the past years, studies of media discourses using a corpus-assisted approach have increased. For example, Samaie & Malmir (2017) were able to reveal the negative portrayal of Islam and Muslims in the US media by utilizing this approach. Kim (2014), on the other hand, examined the discursive practices of mainstream US media outlets about North Korea. Other examples of corpus-assisted discourse studies include an examination of the representations of the Sunflower Movement in the Taiwanese press (Brindle, 2016); representations of China's Belt and Road initiative in the Chinese and British press (Zhang & Wu, 2017); representations of Tibet in various influential Anglo-American press (Liu, 2019); and reports on China's air pollution in the Chinese press (Wang, 2018). However, media discourses about the anti-extradition bill protests in Hong Kong remains a largely unexplored topic in corpus-based researches, which can perhaps be attributed to the recency of this phenomenon. Therefore, this study aims to explore how this specific political phenomenon that captured immediate global interest is represented in selected mainstream media outlets from the two world powers and ideological rivals, namely the US and China.

## Data and Methodology

The data for this study were collected from the articles published by *CNN* and *China Daily* about the anti-extradition bill protests in Hong Kong. These articles were obtained through the aid of *LexisNexis Academic*, an online database containing the publications of hundreds of media outlets worldwide. *Hong Kong* was used as the search expression and the time frame was set between June 1, 2019 and August 31, 2019. The results generated by the database were screened to exclude the articles which are not related to the protests. Although Hong Kong's political crisis remains unsettled at the time of the data collection, the articles about the successive large-scale protests and violent confrontations starting on June 9 up to Carrie Lam's decision to formally withdraw the bill on September 4 are well-covered in the data. Overall, the *CNN* corpus contains 106 articles with 112,269 word tokens, while the *China Daily* corpus contains 392 articles with 243,448 word tokens.

*China Daily* is currently the most influential English-language news source about China which claims to have more than 200 million readers worldwide (China Daily, n.d.a; Ke, 2010). Founded in 1981, this Beijing-based newspaper initially received a financial subsidy from the government before fully becoming financially independent. In 1995, it ventured into the digital media which facilitated its accessibility to the international audience (China Daily, n.d.b). It also has diversified its operations into various international editions, such as the Hong Kong Edition, the US Edition, and the African Edition. Despite its financial independence from the government, it continues to spread the official views of the Communist Party of China (Hachten, 2010). Thus, given its extensive global reach, it plays a vital role in promoting China's positive image to the world which has become a top propaganda priority of the Chinese government under Xi Jinping (Baijie, 2018).

On the other hand, *CNN* is a privately-owned US-based broadcasting company and is currently one of the most recognizable news sources in the world. Aside from its reputation, it is also one of the global leaders in terms of news coverage with 36 editorial operations and around 3,000 employees worldwide (CNN Press Room, 2019). In 2018, it was ranked as the no. 1 global news brand in online news destination by *Comscore Media Metrix* with a monthly average of 157 million unique visitors, outpacing other mainstream Western media outlets, such as the *BBC*, *Yahoo! News*, *HuffPost Global*, *The New York Times*, and *Fox News* (CNN Press Room, 2018). Presently, it remains as a top source of global news given its extensive global reach and use of the English language. Furthermore, similar to *China Daily*, the anti-extradition bill protests in Hong Kong are well-covered by *CNN* which is evident in the sizeable quantity of news articles it has published about this phenomenon.

Two corpus linguistics programs were used in this study. AntConc (Anthony, n.d.), a corpus analysis freeware, was utilized for keyword extraction. Using its Keyword tool, the *China Daily* corpus and the *CNN* corpus were compared against each other to identify the most salient words in the two corpora. On the other hand, Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2014), a web-based corpus analysis software, was utilized to perform concordance searches and examine collocations. Additionally, through the Word Sketch feature, Sketch Engine not only identifies the collocates of a particular word under investigation, but also specifies the grammatical relationship between them. Overall, performing the said data analytical procedures guides this study in uncovering the contrasting discourses produced by *CNN* and *China Daily* about the anti-extradition bill protests in Hong Kong.

<div align="center">Analysis</div>

To address the first research question raised by this study, the *CNN* corpus and the *China Daily* corpus were compared using AntConc's keyword tool. As shown in Table 1, the keywords in each corpus were ranked by their respective keyness values which were calculated using the log-likelihood test ($p < 0.05$). The higher the keyness value of a word indicates that it has an unusual frequency in the corpus when compared with another corpus (Baker, 2006). The words derived from AntConc and Sketch Engine are presented in this study in either italic or bold forms, while their respective frequencies are enclosed within parentheses.

**Table 1** Top 10 Keywords in *China Daily* and *CNN* Ordered by Keyness

| | China Daily | | | CNN | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. | Word | Frequency | Keyness | Word | Frequency | Keyness |
| 1 | SAR | 475 | 332.18 | democracy | 225 | 308.5 |
| 2 | law | 1187 | 219.34 | pro | 208 | 280.77 |
| 3 | amendments | 257 | 159.12 | Beijing | 243 | 264.65 |
| 4 | HKSAR | 212 | 157.65 | Chinese | 393 | 257.08 |
| 5 | amendment | 225 | 149.09 | China | 587 | 254.26 |
| 6 | administrative | 242 | 137.48 | CNN | 92 | 215.31 |
| 7 | region | 245 | 129.9 | movement | 193 | 202.86 |
| 8 | public | 649 | 113.39 | protests | 547 | 196.3 |
| 9 | special | 256 | 109.48 | Kongers | 70 | 163.81 |
| 10 | percent | 145 | 107.81 | protest | 256 | 144.97 |

A great number of keywords in *China Daily* are derived from the official name and acronym of Hong Kong, such as *administrative*, *region*, *special*, *SAR* (an acronym for Special Administrative Region), and *HKSAR* (an acronym for Hong Kong Special Administrative Region). This particular naming strategy when referring to Hong Kong indicates *China Daily's* strategic use of the city's official name and acronym to emphasize its political status as an inalienable part of China since the 1997 handover from the British. In stressing Chinese jurisdiction over the Hong Kong territory, the media outlet expresses China's fundamental position that the city's political crisis is its internal affair which must be free from any foreign interference:

(1) Beijing has reiterated its unshakable and principled stance regarding Hong Kong affairs numerous times over the years -- the **HKSAR** is an inalienable part of China, a **special administrative region** directly under the overall jurisdiction of the Central People's Government of the PRC; and Hong Kong affairs are China's domestic affairs beyond intervention by any foreign government. (*China Daily*, July 31, 2019)

Another top keyword in *China Daily* is *law* which is found to have two main usage variations. Its first dominant usage is for the construction of phrases related to the Hong Kong government's measure to amend the city's extradition laws, namely *fugitive law* (15), *fugitive law amendments* (8), *fugitive law amendment bill* (6), *extradition law* (72), *extradition law amendments* (60), and *extradition law amendment bill* (87). The use of these phrases reveals the various naming strategies employed in *China Daily* when referring to what is commonly known as the *extradition bill* (163) in *CNN*.

The second dominant usage of *law* is for the construction of the phrase *rule of law* (323) which refers to a specific political principle of Western origin. The relatively high frequency of this phrase in *China Daily* indicates the need for further scrutiny. Accordingly, a close examination of the contextual usage of this phrase

reveals the stance taken by *China Daily* to construct the protests as an unlawful phenomenon undermining the rule of law in Hong Kong, as the following examples demonstrate:

（2）Weeks of turmoil featuring violent behaviors and unlawful acts are more than enough to show that prolonging the dispute would only do further damage to the city. Hong Kong's much cherished **rule of law**, social harmony and political stability, key factors underpinning its long-term prosperity, have been badly undermined. (*China Daily*, July 12, 2019)

（3）According to the principle of law and the International Covenants of Human Rights, while exercising the right to freedom of expression, a person should not undermine other people's rights and interests. And since Hong Kong is a region governed by the **rule of law**, it has no place for illegal actions and violent radicalism that the protestors demonstrated on the pretext of exercising the right to freedom of expression. (*China Daily*, June 19, 2019)

（4）On Tuesday, the Law Society of Hong Kong -- a professional body representing more than 95 percent of lawyers in the region -- issued a statement saying that the protesters had defiantly affronted the **rule of law** by breaking into the Legislative Council building by force, inflicting bodily harm on others and causing serious damage to the building. (*China Daily*, July 4, 2019)

In Example (2), the writer warns that prolonging the political crisis will cause more harm than benefits to Hong Kong because of the violent and unlawful behavior exhibited by the protesters. Moreover, it can be seen in the succeeding examples how the writers emphasize that such behavior is contrary to the existing laws and the views of legal practitioners. In Example (3), the writer invokes the principle of law and an international treaty to criticize the protesters and accuse them of instigating a public nuisance under the guise of freedom of expression. On the other hand, Example (4) demonstrates the writer's clever reference to the statement of condemnation issued by a professional law organization. By emphasizing that this organization represents virtually all lawyers in Hong Kong, the writer is attempting to authoritatively support the stance of *China Daily* in portraying that the protests pose a threat to the city's rule of law tradition.

Furthermore, contrary to the protesters' claim that the bill could undermine the integrity of Hong Kong's legal system in the period of China's expanding influence, the writers in *China Daily* contend that it was crafted to promote justice by proposing a remedy to the city's existing legal loopholes. Thus, the Hong Kong government's proposal to amend the city's extradition laws is portrayed as a necessary measure consistent with existing international and municipal laws, and towards the promotion of the rule of law:

（5）The bill is well-intended as it promotes justice by plugging some loopholes in Hong Kong's existing legal framework. The amendments are strictly in line with international rendition protocols, Hong Kong's Basic Law and the **rule of law**. (*China Daily*, June 17, 2019)

（6）The proposed amendments also demonstrate Hong Kong's resolution to uphold social justice and safeguard the **rule of law**, a core value of Hong Kong society, Chan said. This will further enhance the SAR's business environment and ensure its continued prosperity and stability. (*China Daily*, June 7, 2019)

The last keyword in *China Daily* that I will examine is *percent*. Of the 145 instances of this word, it is found that 93 instances are used in reporting the adverse economic impacts of the political crisis. It therefore indicates that the media outlet correspondingly constructs the protests as a phenomenon disrupting Hong Kong's economic stability. In the following examples, it is noticeable how the writers highlight the consequences of the protests on the income of the labor force and revenues of small and medium-sized enterprises in the city. This

reporting strategy is adopted to illustrate that the protests are causing inconvenience to the daily lives of Hong Kong residents:

(7) More than 340,000 small- and medium-sized enterprises in the city, which account for over 98 **percent** of business units and employ about 45 **percent** of the private sector's workforce, have borne the brunt of the violent clashes. (*China Daily*, August 10, 2019)

(8) Weeks of upheaval has undermined the social order and an already weak economy, with Hong Kong's retail, restaurants and tourism already hit hard. The disorder has frayed Hong Kong residents' nerves and made lives difficult. Many small and medium-sized enterprises said they have suffered a 30-**percent** drop in earnings and pay cuts for employees in recent months, according to a survey. (*China Daily*, August 23, 2019)

In *CNN*, the top two keywords are *democracy* and *pro* which usually co-occur with each other in the corpus to form the adjective *pro-democracy* (134). The frequent use of this adjective in portraying the protests as well as the various social actors who spearheaded the opposition to the bill reveals the stance taken by *CNN* to construct the protests as a collective act seeking to safeguard and promote democratic freedoms in Hong Kong:

(9) A Hong Kong police officer fired a live shot into the air as protesters squared off against police armed with water cannons Sunday, in one of the most violent nights seen since mass **pro-democracy** protests began 12 weekends ago. (*CNN*, August 26, 2019)

(10) **Pro-Democracy** figures said that the bill, championed by the pro-Beijing Lam government, would lead to the erosion of civil rights in Hong Kong, including freedom of speech and rule of law. (*CNN*, June 14, 2019)

(11) Hong Kong's government frequently touts the territory's rule of law, with a particular focus on the judiciary's international reputation for independence. In contrast, the Umbrella Movement and subsequent repression of the territory's **pro-democracy** movement have underscored the extent to which the executive and legislative branches are beholden to Beijing. As a result, the Hong Kong and Beijing governments have increasingly tried to hide their repression behind Hong Kong's judges. (*CNN*, June 10, 2019)

It can be seen in Example (9) how the writer uses the phrase *mass pro-democracy protests* as an alternative naming strategy when referring to the anti-extradition bill protests. Moreover, other than the use of the adjective *pro-democracy*, the succeeding examples also provide additional insights into the contrasting ideological stances of *CNN* and *China Daily*, specifically by scrutinizing how the phrase *rule of law* was employed in their respective texts. In Example (10), the writer highlights the city's political rift between the pro-democracy camp defending against further erosion of civil rights and rule of law, and the pro-Beijing Hong Kong government which spearheaded the controversial extradition bill. On the other hand, the writer of Example (11) criticizes the latter for its alleged collusion with the Chinese government in undermining the city's rule of law and repressing its pro-democracy movements. As discussed previously, this stance is in stark contrast to the approach taken by *China Daily* in charging the protesters for jeopardizing the city's rule of law tradition.

The conclusion that *CNN* constructed the protests as a democratic struggle is correspondingly drawn upon examining the usage of *movement* as another top keyword in the *CNN* corpus. Accordingly, it is found to have a strong collocational relationship with the words *umbrella* (57), *protests* (58), and *2014* (27). These words are apparently used in mentioning the series of protests in Hong Kong that took place in late 2014 or commonly known as the Umbrella Movement. These protests were triggered by the decision of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress that imposed limitations to the selection process for the succeeding Chief Executive of Hong Kong. Thus, in constructing the 2019 anti-extradition bill protests as a democratic

struggle, the writers in *CNN* regularly draw similarities with the previous 2014 protests as both of these events are said to be driven by the Hong Kong citizens' fear of China's expanding influence on their city's political arena:

(12) Protesters occupying the Legislative Council building on Monday hoisted a British-colonial-era flag, calling for more democracy -- the main demand of the 2014 ***Umbrella Movement***, which immobilized the city's financial district for 79 days. (*CNN*, June 27, 2019)

(13) Despite the risk, the people of Hong Kong know their future is at stake, and they seem determined to safeguard their freedoms. The last time they demanded stronger democracy, in 2014, the so-called ***umbrella movement*** failed and many went to prison. (*CNN*, June 17, 2019)

For the next phase of this study, I will examine how the above-discussed findings manifest in the two media outlets' portrayal of the Hong Kong police and the protesters opposing the extradition bill. Being at the forefront of the political crisis, the activities of these two opposing social actors, who were entangled in a series of confrontations and provocations, have been constantly monitored and reported since the protests began. By using the Word Sketch feature of Sketch Engine, the grammatical and collocational behavior of the lemma *protester* and *police* were obtained for further scrutiny.

An examination of the Word Sketch of *protester* reveals the contrasting naming strategies employed by the writers in the two media outlets. In *CNN*, the noun *protester* is modified by *young* (40), *many* (15) *Hong Kong* (27), *pro-democracy* (15) and *peaceful* (8). The lexical choice of *young* as the most frequent modifier constructs the protests as a democratic struggle being spearheaded by Hong Kong's younger generation. Specifically, their opposition to the bill is said to be driven by their anxiety about the prospect of the city's autonomy being eroded due to China's encroachment on its internal affairs (Ives & Yi, 2019). As the following example demonstrates, the young Hong Kong citizens spearheading the protests are portrayed as being eager to defend their democratic freedoms which the citizens of the mainland do not enjoy:

(14) The dichotomy between being a Hong Konger and Chinese also encompasses the larger conflict between the two generations' values. Hong Kong has protected freedoms of speech, press, and assembly -- which ***young protesters*** guard fiercely and see as fundamental to Hong Kong's DNA. (*CNN*, July 3, 2019)

In *China Daily*, the noun *protester* is modified by *radical* (180), *masked* (34), and *violent* (49). The word *radical* generally refers to someone who is advocating fundamental or drastic transformation to an existing practice. However, the semantic prosody is apparent in *China Daily* when the concordance lines of *radical* as a modifier of *protester* are further scrutinized. It is found that the majority of instances employed this naming strategy to underscore the unlawful and violent behavior they exhibited during the protests. Thus, the lexical choice of *radical* was meant to imply a negative connotation. This conclusion was correspondingly drawn upon examining how *China Daily* used the word *violent* as another top modifier of *protesters* in its texts:

(15) While damage assessment of all the destruction of public property by ***violent protesters*** since June 12 is still going on, many people are asking why the opposition parties have not condemned this display of extreme radicalism. The truth is the opposition camp planned and conducted the whole anti-extradition law amendment bill campaign and incited the violent protests, with generous support and encouragement from outside forces. (*China Daily*, July 5, 2019)

In this example, the writer in *China Daily* considers the damages to property inflicted by the protesters as a "display of extreme radicalism" which reverberated the statement made by the Chinese government to condemn

the protests (Stevenson & Hernández, 2019). It also charges the protesters not only for organizing violent protests but also for receiving foreign backing.

The portrayal of the police in *CNN* and *China Daily* is also worth examining since their actions have sparked an intense debate about the Hong Kong government's handling of the crisis. The opposition camp has accused the police of using unnecessary force against the protesters. Due to this accusation, they also demanded an independent probe into the claims of police brutality from the government. On the other hand, Hong Kong authorities have firmly defended the police by claiming that their actions are done in accordance with the best interest and safety of Hong Kong citizens.

By using Word Sketch, it is found that *police* is the subject of *fire* (29), *say* (28), *use* (10), *clear* (6), and *raid* (5) in *CNN*. Except for the reporting verb *say*, examining the concordance lines of these verbs reveals that the incidences of police repression or their aggressive acts toward the protesters were highlighted in the texts of *CNN*. For example, all 29 instances of *police fire* and 9 instances of *police use* illustrate the use of various crowd control weapons, such as tear gases, pepper sprays, rubber bullets, and beanbag guns, thereby implying that the Hong Kong police have used arbitrary and excessive force against the protesters. In the following examples, it can be seen how the writers portrayed the police as the aggressor by employing repressive tactics during their encounters with the protesters:

(16) **Police fired** round after round of tear gas, much of it without warning, and deployed pepper spray and rubber bullets at protesters who would not move. (*CNN*, June 12, 2019)

(17) Later that day, up to 5,000 riot **police fired** 150 rounds of tear gas, rubber bullets and bean bag rounds in clashes with protesters. The number of tear gas canisters used was almost double the amount fired during 2014's pro-democracy Umbrella Movement, when the city was brought to a standstill for 79 days. (*CNN*, June 13, 2019)

(18) Thousands of demonstrators continued what is intended to be a peaceful three-day sit-in at Hong Kong's international airport on Saturday, while **police used** tear gas on protesters at two other sites in the city. (*CNN*, August 10, 2019)

In contrast, if the Word Sketch of *police* is considered in *China Daily*, it is found that this noun is the subject of *arrest* (9), *try* (9), *use* (8), *fire* (5) *say* (17), and *issue* (5). In the following examples, it can be seen how the writers justify the police's use of force and arrests by underscoring the provocative acts committed by the protesters. Thus, the negative portrayal of the protesters in *China Daily* are still apparent when the writers are accounting for the actions performed by the police:

(19) During Monday's unrest, **police arrested** 148 people for taking part in riots, unlawful assembly, assaulting police officer, obstructing police officers in executing their duties and possession of offensive weapons. (*China Daily*, August 7, 2019)

(20) During an anti-extradition bill rally held in Sha Tin district on Sunday night, masked radical protesters threw bricks, umbrellas and bottles at police from higher floors of a shopping center when **police tried** to disperse them. (*China Daily*, July 15, 2019)

(21) He said **police** have **used** necessary force, including batons, pepper spray, tear gas and rubber bullets on protesters as their actions turned violent. (*China Daily*, June 12, 2019)

As opposed to the negative verbs mainly employed in *CNN*, the police operations during the protests was depicted in *China Daily* using a relatively lenient tone. From this stance, the Hong Kong police are portrayed as actors who exercise caution and restraint in dealing with the protesters.

Additionally, it can be seen that *police* is also the subject of *fire* in *China Daily*. As previously discussed, similar instances are found in *CNN*, although significantly higher, when its writers depict the arbitrary and excessive use of force by the police against the protesters. However, the distinction between these two media outlets in using the phrase *police fire* is evident. A significant case to consider is their contrasting account of the violent confrontations between the police and the protesters in Sheung Wan on July 28. The following example illustrates how *CNN* reported the incident:

(22) The situation quickly deteriorated. **Police fired** multiple rounds of tear gas and rubber bullets at protesters, turning nearby streets into smoke-filled battlegrounds. Protesters, many of whom had armed themselves with improvised shields and bamboo sticks, fought back, hurling bricks, eggs and other objects at police lines. (*CNN*, July 29, 2019)

The writer of Example (22) depicts how the police turned the situation on the streets into chaos through their aggressive use of crowd control weapons, thereby prompting the protesters to retaliate by throwing various objects at police lines. *China Daily*, however, reported the incident differently. In the following example, the writer suggests that the police have resorted to the use of force as a response to the provocative acts committed by the protesters, such as charging the police lines by throwing various objects:

(23) The stand-off was particularly tense in the Western district and Sheung Wan, where **police fired** tear gas and rubber bullets to disperse demonstrators who charged police cordon lines by hurling bricks, umbrellas and bottles, and pushing burning trolleys at advancing officers. (*China Daily*, July 29, 2019)

Additional insights into *China Daily's* reporting strategy to legitimize police operations is further revealed in the Word Sketch of *police*, wherein this noun is the object of *support* (28), *say* (22), and *attack* (8). If the concordance lines of *support* are examined, it is found that all 28 instances were employed to echo the sentiments of various pro-Beijing politicians, private organizations, and individuals in support of the Hong Kong police. For example, amid the foreign and local news reporting on the size of the protests, *China Daily* published an article with a headline "*165,000 people rally to show support for police*". In this article, the statement made by pro-Beijing legislator Junius Ho Kwan-yiu, one of the co-organizers of the rally, was summarized in the following lines:

(24) The message of **supporting the police** was well delivered at the rally, Ho stressed. He praised officers for diligently performing their duties despite facing provocation and insults. (*China Daily*, July 1, 2019)

Thus, the Hong Kong police are also portrayed in *China Daily* as a vital organization during the crisis that deserves public commendation for properly carrying out their duties despite the annoyances and disturbances caused by the protesters.

## Conclusion

This study combined the techniques of corpus linguistics with discourse analysis to reveal the differences in the discursive constructions of the 2019 Hong Kong protests by *CNN* and *China Daily*. Using this approach, the study was able to uncover the distinct patterns of language use and choices of these media outlets to convey

attitudes and affect their audiences' cognition, thereby resulting in their varying representations of the said phenomenon.

Adhering to democratic norms and procedures has been a core political principle in the West. As a mainstream Western media outlet, *CNN's* prejudice in favor of propagating this principle is apparent in the way it covered and interpreted the protests. Informed by its perception that Hong Kong's political crisis is a democratic struggle that bears semblance to the 2014 Umbrella Movement, it has produced a discourse that is largely sympathetic to the cause of the protesters. Such discourse is substantially framed within the narrative of Hong Kong citizens resisting the incursion of the Chinese authoritarian state into their city's political arena. This ideological stance has also influenced its reporting on the violent clashes between the police and the protesters. As revealed in this study, the incidences of police repression are relatively prominent in the texts of *CNN* which imply the pro-Beijing Hong Kong government's repressive response to the democratic aspirations of its citizens.

This study also provides a modest contribution towards understanding the role played by mainstream Chinese media in propelling China's global propaganda campaign to assume greater control over its narratives. Through its discursive construction of the protests, *China Daily* has effectively aided the Chinese government in producing a counter-narrative to these protests that will challenge the discourse largely produced in the Western media. Specifically, it has constructed the protests as an unlawful and disruptive phenomenon by negatively portraying the protesters, and amplifying their unlawful and violent behavior. Thus, other than promoting China's positive image, Hong Kong's political crisis also exposed how Chinese media outlets such as *China Daily*, given their efforts to reach a broader international audience, robustly disseminate the official views of the Chinese government to shape the global opinion on the protests. Future studies could explore the problems of reliability and acceptability faced by these media outlets in disseminating state-sanctioned narratives, especially to audiences from countries where press freedom is guaranteed. Producing a counter-narrative to Hong Kong's political crisis poses a huge challenge to these media outlets which could undermine China's ambitious attempts to influence the global media.

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