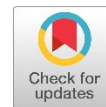


Liberate Hong Kong? Language, agency, and imagining political futures

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ABSTRACT

The slogan “Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times” (光復香港，時代革命) emerged during the 2019 protests as a symbol of solidarity and political aspiration among Hongkongers. Its prominence and subsequent criminalization highlight its role in debates over identity, governance, and self-determination. This article examines the discursive function of the slogan and its pedagogical implications within Critical English for Academic Purposes (CEAP), showing how language can challenge state narratives while fostering civic engagement. Using documentary analysis, the study combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with CEAP to trace the slogan’s role as a discursive act, drawing on political addresses, policy responses, and exiled initiatives. Findings indicate that the slogan operates as a counter-discourse to the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) reunification narrative. It constructs political agency and solidarity among participants. It also shapes imaginaries of political transformation, reflected in diasporic activism and proposals for alternative governance. By integrating CDA and CEAP, the study highlights the slogan’s dual political and pedagogical significance, demonstrating how language learning can intersect with civic imagination to promote critical engagement with governance, agency, and self-determination. Overall, the analysis underscores the interdisciplinary reach of applied linguistics and the capacity of discourse to enact social critique and envision political possibilities.



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1. Introduction

On June 30, 2020, China imposed a National Security Law in Hong Kong. This imposition was widely criticized as undermining the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration and restricting autonomy and civil liberties. In response to China’s violation of the treaty, the British government offered a pathway to citizenship for British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) holders. On July 1, 2020, Tong Ying-kit carried a flag displaying the slogan “Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times” (光復香港，時代革命) (illustrated in [Figure 1](#)) into a group of police officers, injuring three. Arrested under the new law, he became its first political prisoner, later convicted of inciting secession and terrorism.



Fig. 1. Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times

The slogan originated in the 2016 Legislative Council New Territories East by-election, coined by Edward Leung of Hong Kong Indigenous. Leung's pro-independence stance led to his disqualification, but the slogan resurfaced during the 2019 protests. Criminalized by authorities, it remains a rallying cry in exile, often chanted after "Glory to Hong Kong", an anthem banned by the Hong Kong government in 2024.

This conceptual article has two aims. First, it analyzes the slogan's role in shaping an imagined political community among Hongkongers. Second, it examines how it extends beyond discursive resistance into broader imaginaries of political transformation. Some initiatives, such as the Tibetan-inspired Hong Kong Parliament, explicitly cite the slogan, while others, including British proposals for a new Hong Kong or entrepreneurial charter cities, do not. This article situates the slogan within these imaginaries as a shared discourse of liberation, treating them as interrelated constructions. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Critical English for Academic Purposes (CEAP), it engages counter-discourse strategies to challenge dominant narratives embedded in China's reunification rhetoric. This article adopts the common English rendition, although it is sometimes translated as "Free Hong Kong, revolution now".

To guide the analysis, the study addresses three research questions:

1. How does the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" function as a discursive construction of identity and resistance?
2. How is the slogan recontextualized in exile and diaspora discourses?
3. What pedagogical potential does CEAP provide in framing such discourses for critical engagement?

The article is structured as follows. Following this introduction, a brief review of relevant literature is presented. This is followed by a methodology section that describes research design, data collection procedure, and analytical processes. The subsequent sections present the analysis and discussion of the slogan's discursive functions and its recontextualization in exile and diaspora imaginaries. The article concludes by highlighting the pedagogical implications and the broader political significance of the slogan, illustrating how language shapes possibilities for civic engagement and imaginative governance.

1.1. Brief Review of Literature

1) CDA in Hong Kong's identity construction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been widely applied to the study of Hong Kong's political discourses. A major contributor to such study is John Flowerdew, who has analyzed speeches and texts from colonial and post-handover leaders, such as Chris Patten and Tung Chee-hwa. He has examined the creation of Hong Kong's bedrock principles (1997, 2016), the ideological framing of Chinese identity (2004b), and metaphors of patriotism (Flowerdew & Leong, 2007). Flowerdew (2017) argues that Hong Kong's identity emerged in opposition to totalitarian rule, identifying metaphors of war and conflict during the 2014 Umbrella Movement. His volume *Critical Discourse Analysis in Historiography: The Case of Hong Kong's Evolving Political Identity* (Flowerdew, 2011), consolidates earlier analyses, showing how political discourses evolved across the sovereignty transition. Other CDA studies include Wang (2017), who analyzes policy addresses to trace identity construction by colonial and post-handover governments; Ng (2020), who examines how Beijing's

voice was recontextualized under Leung's administration; and W. Tang (2014), who explores diasporic narratives of imagining Hong Kong. K. H. Wong (2024) demonstrates how Carrie Lam's political responses during the 2019 Hong Kong protests ultimately resulted in the imposition of the National Security Law.

Although CDA is often applied to large corpora, it can also be used in case studies of specific discursive elements. Flowerdew (2004a) analyzes three politically grounded texts to examine the discursive imaginary of a world-class city. Similarly, this study focuses on the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times", along with selected political addresses and the Charter of Hongkongers in Britain (n.d.). It shows how the slogan contributes to power dynamics, resistance, and identity formation in the Hong Kong pro-democracy movement.

Slogans are powerful sites of condensed political meaning. Leung (2024) analyzes "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times", finding that it calls for rectifying perceived problems without specifying solutions. A. Tang (2022) emphasizes how protesters' speech acts reflect democratic consciousness and the desire for liberation. These studies focus mainly on local protest contexts or legal interpretations. They leave open questions about how the slogan operates in exile and diaspora discourses.

2) *CEAP in critical pedagogy and civic engagement*

Critical English for Academic Purposes (CEAP) provides a framework for linking language learning with civic engagement (Chun, 2015; Fenton-Smith, 2014). It treats texts as sites of power and ideology and promotes serious engagement with global and political issues. Although originally pedagogical, CEAP principles have extended beyond the classroom. They enable analysis of power structures in broader political contexts. Fenton-Smith (2014) illustrates this with Chinese international students in Australia who counter-protested demonstrations against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s occupation of Tibet during the 2008 Olympic torch relay. Their counter-protests aligned with CEAP's principles by fostering critical discourse around political resistance. K. H. Wong (2025a) examines Hong Kong's anthem "Glory to Hong Kong" as a text of resistance to Chinese occupation and explores its pedagogical potential for BN(O) exiles using CEAP principles.

CEAP's critique of neutrality in education highlights the limits of the United Kingdom's BN(O) lifeboat policy, which assimilates rather than transforms. Its focus on agency resonates with Hongkongers' civic resistance. Its structural orientation is visible in activism, including protest letters (Benesch, 1996), identity initiatives (Morgan & Ahmed, 2023), critical citizenship education (Fleming & Morgan, 2011), and community-based projects (Morgan, 2009). Building on the structural orientation of CEAP, K. H. Wong (2025b) extends this framework and suggests that the slogan's ideals could find expression through institutional imaginaries such as a self-governing Crown Dependency on British soil. This approach demonstrates that CDA and CEAP together can illuminate the slogan's political and pedagogical significance, illustrate how discourse can shape civic engagement, and reimagine constitutional futures for Hongkongers.

3) *Research gap*

Despite extensive CDA scholarship on Hong Kong political discourse and some analyses of the "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" slogan, few studies integrate these insights with CEAP or explore the slogan's role in exile and diaspora imaginaries. This article addresses these gaps by analyzing the slogan as a discursive construction of identity, resistance, and political imagination, while highlighting its pedagogical and civic implications.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This exploratory study is part of a larger doctoral research project on Hong Kong's political identity. Rather than using conventional data collection methods such as interviews and ethnography, documentary research is employed to gather data from existing documents, including official records, YouTube videos, news articles, and other relevant materials. These documents provide "excellent data to understand society" (Grant, 2018, p. 4). This study employs CDA to examine the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times", situating it within its broader sociopolitical context. CDA is a qualitative methodology that aims to reveal how discourse shapes social and political realities,

particularly concerning power, dominance, and inequality (Grant, 2018). The analysis is then extended through CEAP principles to explore pedagogical implications.

2.2. Data Collection

This study draws on three sources of data. First, the protest slogan was obtained in the form of a widely circulated flag available online. Since the image is in the public domain and reproduced across numerous websites, the exact source is not significant. As noted in the introduction, some versions of the flag render the English translation as “Free Hong Kong, revolution now”. For consistency, however, this article adopts the most commonly recognized version, “Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times”. Second, speeches by key public figures were collected from reputable news outlets such as *The Guardian* and from YouTube. Where transcripts were available, they were cited directly; where only recordings existed, the speeches were manually transcribed by the author and checked for accuracy. These speeches were selected because they addressed pivotal issues such as the imposition of the National Security Law and its implications for Hong Kong’s political identity and democratic future. Finally, the Charter of Hongkongers in Britain (n.d.) was obtained directly from its official website, ensuring authenticity.

2.3. Data Analysis

The study employed Flowerdew’s (2017) critical discourse historiographical approach (CDH) to critical discourse studies as a framework for analysis, focusing on how the slogan constructs ideas of independence, civic values, and resistance. Interpretations were triangulated with political speeches by key public figures, the Charter of the Hongkongers in Britain (n.d.), and relevant interdisciplinary literature on Hong Kong politics to situate the slogan within wider discursive and historical frameworks. This approach enabled a nuanced reading of the slogan’s ideological and symbolic functions despite its brevity. Furthermore, by applying the principles of CEAP, the study highlights the potential for such discourses to foster critical civic reflection and imaginative engagement with political possibilities.

Discursive elements were examined through four main strategies: presupposition, othering, framing, and involvement. Presupposition refers to assumptions about the audience’s background knowledge or perceived conditions that must be addressed (Flowerdew, 2004b). Othering highlights the perceived difference between groups. While it often targets racial or ethnic groups, in Hong Kong’s context it has been used to distinguish Chinese mainlanders (Lin et al., 2022). Framing involves the selection of words and phrases to define problems, actors, and actions, often shaped by “primary definers”—official voices with the authority to establish dominant interpretations (Flowerdew & Leong, 2007). Finally, involvement strategies are used by politicians to foster a sense of connection with constituents (Flowerdew, 2004b). These strategies have been widely applied in previous CDA research on Hong Kong politics (e.g., Flowerdew, 2004b; Flowerdew & Leong, 2007).

3. Findings

3.1. Discourse on Hong Kong Independence and British Values

As CDA requires interpretation within context, it is necessary to revisit the conditions under which Edward Leung coined the slogan. The 31 August Decision, issued by the National People’s Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC) in 2014, imposed restrictions on the 2017 Chief Executive election. The Decision stated that “the Chief Executive shall be a person who loves the country and loves Hong Kong” (愛國愛港) (Xinhua, 2014, para. 5). Yet the phrase “the country” functioned as a “highly marked presuppositional trigger” (Flowerdew, 2004b, p. 1562). In this context, the statement presupposed China as “the country” whom one must love, a usage that became discursively possible only after the transfer of sovereignty in 1997, when Beijing assumed political control over Hong Kong. This represented a form of manipulation, which occurs “if speakers willfully make assumptions about their hearers which they know not to be the case” (Flowerdew, 2004b, p. 1561). For many Hongkongers, the injunction to “love the country” conflicted with the promises of autonomy under “one country, two systems”, as well as with the continued civic and legal ties to Britain through British nationality.

The Decision paper served as a catalyst for a competing discourse and the emergence of localist groups, whose views were succinctly articulated by Edward Leung:

Some of us realised that, well, as long as we are under Chinese rule there is no hope to realise democracy or real autonomy in Hong Kong. It is still not a mainstream idea—we are still a minority, but we are getting more and more popular, and the tendency is growing. And that is the most essential point of our movement—it is growing especially among our generation (Phillips & Cheung, 2016, para. 20–21).

In the extract above, Leung employed an othering strategy, framing China as the adversarial Other against whom Hongkongers must struggle. His repeated use of the indexical “we” functioned as an involvement strategy, presupposing that his generation of Hongkongers would support Hong Kong’s independence from Chinese rule. Although he acknowledged that the movement was not yet mainstream, his use of the superlative “most” in describing its growth conveyed a strong sense of certainty.

The slogan’s framing strategy positioned Hong Kong under totalitarian oppression, while portraying the protests as a revolutionary struggle against Chinese occupation. The term “revolution” implied not just reform, but a fundamental transformation of the political system. “Our times” spoke to a collective identity shaped by democratic freedoms experienced before China’s political incursion, from which Hong Kong must be liberated. This interpretation became particularly salient in 2019, when Hong Kong protesters displayed the British colonial flag as an expression of nostalgia for the relative freedoms experienced under British rule and a symbolic rejection of Chinese colonization of Hong Kong.

Although Hong Kong independence is identified as an aspiration encapsulated in the slogan, hardliners often cite the Basic Law—Hong Kong’s mini-constitution—which states that Hong Kong is an inalienable part of China, as proof of its impossibility. The disqualification of pro-independence politicians exemplifies the exercise of dominance and control through legal mechanisms. Despite the Basic Law, Hong Kong’s identity is not solely defined by its territorial subjugation to China. While the physical space of Hong Kong is now under Chinese control, a significant portion of its people maintain a legal relationship with the United Kingdom as British nationals. Hardliners downplay both the United Kingdom’s historical sovereignty over Hong Kong and the legal nationality status of its residents, who remain part of the British nationality framework. Far from identifying with China, Hongkongers have historically positioned themselves as inheritors of British civic traditions, reflecting a distinct political and cultural identity (Flowerdew, 2004b, 2016, 2017).

In the context of the BN(O) offer, when China’s Ambassador to the United Kingdom Liu Xiaoming (劉曉明) urged British politicians to “regard Hong Kong as a part of China, not as a part of the UK” (“Hong Kong protests: UK should not interfere, says Chinese Ambassador”, 2019, para. 11), he disregarded the legal relationship between Hongkongers and the United Kingdom. Just as the “Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times” slogan was often displayed in English during the protests, Liu’s counter-discourse about Hong Kong’s status was similarly articulated in clear English to ensure his message was understood without ambiguity. His presupposition that Hong Kong, and, by extension, its people, were Chinese, exemplified a hegemonic discourse that distorted reality.

CDA offers tools to deconstruct such distortions. For instance, Flowerdew (2004b) argues that Chris Patten’s portrayal of Hong Kong’s four bedrock principles as its defining values was itself a distortion, as these ideas were “open to question” (p. 1561). Liu’s emphasis on the phrase “not as a part of the UK” appeared to manipulate the British belief that Hong Kong was considered a part of the United Kingdom. The Ambassador assumed the British politicians accepted Hong Kong as entirely separate from the United Kingdom, even though they did not share his view. The wording on the inside cover of the BN(O) passport functions as a presupposition trigger: by stating the holder possess a Hong Kong permanent identity card, it assumes Hong Kong to be under British jurisdiction in a manner comparable to other British Overseas Territories. In effect, the United Kingdom produced a passport that, through its emphasis on Hong Kong residency, preserves the impression of an enduring Britishness in Hong Kong despite the 1997 handover. In the broader context of the argument for extending British citizenship to BN(O)s, the United Kingdom’s legal and diplomatic obligations

toward its nationals, particularly within the framework of the Sino-British Joint Declaration, became prominent.

Notwithstanding the existing legal relationship between Hongkongers and the United Kingdom, the two also share core values of freedom and autonomy (Yu, 2022, 2023). Hong Kong's identity aligns with the United Kingdom's, particularly in cultural and political values (GOV.UK, 2021). The Ambassador overlooked Hongkongers' historical ties with the United Kingdom, which had shaped these shared values, and disregarded the United Kingdom's legal obligation to some 2.9 million British nationals and their dependents facing political repression from China. In total, the British government potentially holds sovereign jurisdiction over 5.4 million Hongkongers (Ullah & Azizuddin, 2022; S. H. Wong et al., 2023). In short, while China may assert nominal control over Hong Kong's physical territory, under the principles of the Joint Declaration its residents remain connected to the United Kingdom both in terms of legal nationality and cultural identity.

3.2. Discourse on Protection and Equality under British Nationality

Following the introduction of BN(O) visa scheme, the struggle against CCP hegemony took on an additional dimension. The concept of liberation expanded beyond resisting CCP rule to freedom from fear. As Ho (2023) notes, Hongkongers feared China's incursion, and this anxiety triggered two possible responses: fight or flight. Those who emigrated under the BN(O) scheme achieved partial liberation in the sense that their rights and freedoms were safeguarded under British jurisdiction. However, their emotional and political ties to Hong Kong remained strong.

The continued use of the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" by exiled Hongkongers in the United Kingdom functions as an act of political agency, calling for greater British government support for Hongkongers not eligible for the BN(O) scheme. The slogan is often displayed in English alongside Chinese and presented in front of international media, reinforcing its appeal to a broader global audience. While the slogan itself has contributed to raising awareness, the expansion of the BN(O) scheme in 2022 was more directly influenced by political advocacy from British figures and broader diplomatic pressure on the British government to act in response to Hong Kong's deteriorating political situation. The BN(O) scheme now allows the "post-handover" generation to apply independently if they can show a connection to a BN(O) parent (GOV.UK, n.d.).

The Charter of Hongkongers in Britain (n.d.) demonstrates this agency by reframing BN(O) status from a mere travel document into a legally recognized nationality and form of Commonwealth citizenship, situating Hongkongers within the United Kingdom's historic commitments rather than as passive recipients of refuge. It redefines Hong Kong not as a territory but as a diasporic community that embodies shared cultural values, while positioning democracy and freedom as universal principles aligned with British common sense rather than partisan politics. By extending rights discourse to dependents and non-BN(O) Hongkongers, the Charter shifts the narrative from benevolence to entitlement, asserting equality, inclusion, and belonging as legitimate claims. In this way, the Charter encodes agency through discourse, transforming identity and citizenship into tools of political recognition and integration.

As the BN(O) scheme is open to individuals with BN(O) status or those with a parental connection to such status, the extent to which Hongkongers have been "liberated" merits consideration. The article now revisits the statement made by Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab immediately after the imposition of National Security Law:

It constitutes a clear violation of the autonomy of Hong Kong, a direct threat to the freedoms of its people, and therefore I'm afraid to say is a serious violation of the Joint Declaration, the treaty between the United Kingdom and China. We will honour our commitments to the BN(O)s, and I'm going to set out further details, including what action we will take with our international partners (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, 2020, 0:07).

Raab employed a framing strategy to present the National Security Law as a "clear violation of the autonomy of Hong Kong", a "direct threat to the freedoms of its people", and "a serious violation of the Joint Declaration". The use of three adjective phrases (clear violation, direct threat, serious violation) served to intensify this framing. The phrase "it constitutes" asserted certainty, leaving little room for alternative interpretations. In the context of China's promulgation of the National Security

Law, Raab framed the erosion of Hong Kong's autonomy, particularly Beijing's bypassing of the Basic Law, as a direct breach of the Joint Declaration. His promise that "we will honour our commitments to the BN(O)s" discursively aligned with the language of liberation central to Hong Kong protests.

4. Discussion

4.1. Power Dynamics

The analysis above exposes power dynamics, which can be understood in two dimensions. The non-scholarly dimension views power as domination, exerted from above through legal state institutions that secure compliance by punishing resistance and dissent (Statham, 2022). The second dimension of power, according to Statham, views hegemony as a legitimization process in which the state persuades subordinate groups that its values are legitimate, with discourse playing a pivotal role. While Statham (2022) explains how power is maintained, CDA extends this framework by exploring how discourse both upholds and challenges these forms of power. For example, using a critical discourse historiography approach, Flowerdew (2017) examines how Hong Kong's 2014 Umbrella Movement became a discursive event that spurred further resistance, including the election of localist candidates to the Legislative Council in 2016. Discourse thus functions not only as a tool for hegemony but also as a space for counter-hegemonic narratives to emerge.

The CCP's reaction to the counter-narratives, particularly among the Hong Kong diaspora, reflects a broader strategy of hegemonic control. The suppression of political discourse aligns with its wider efforts to dominate the global narrative on Hong Kong's status. The extraterritorial application of the National Security Law exemplifies this hegemonic reach, reinforced through the creation and naturalization of myths. Political power is often secured by reiterating a constructed narrative until it becomes accepted as truth (Flowerdew, 2004b). The persistent assertion that "Hong Kong is an inalienable part of China" is presented as an unquestionable fact.

Building on this distortion, the CCP then claims that Hong Kong's diaspora are Chinese nationals, despite many holding foreign citizenship. This claim exemplifies presuppositional manipulation. Many Hongkongers holding foreign citizenship are either unaware of or consciously reject their Chinese nationality (Ching, 2018). By framing exiled Hongkongers as Chinese nationals, the CCP legitimizes extraterritorial prosecutions, as seen in the case of Samuel Chu, a United States citizen and founder of the Hong Kong Democracy Council. His advocacy for US sanctions against Chinese officials led to an arrest warrant being issued, reinforcing the CCP's ability to assert control over foreign citizens engaging in political activism abroad. The National Security Law thus not only punishes political actions but also enforces China's ideological dominance.

Although the BN(O) scheme addresses aspects of the Joint Declaration related to the rights and freedoms of Hongkongers, another key provision remains unresolved: the commitment to an elected parliamentary system. Following reforms initiated by the Chinese government in 2021, the number of directly elected seats in Hong Kong's legislature has been reduced to twenty, further consolidating Beijing's political control. Given the ongoing implications of these electoral changes, potential policy responses regarding the status of Hongkongers within the framework of the Joint Declaration warrant further examination. The following section will explore possible approaches to addressing this issue, building upon the principles outlined in the CEAP framework.

4.2. The Crown Dependency as a Hongkongers-in-Exile Discursive Imaginary

While the United Kingdom has taken steps to address China's violations of the Joint Declaration by allowing Hongkongers to live, work, and study in the United Kingdom, discussions about its role in facilitating a democratically elected autonomous government for Hongkongers remain ongoing. The prospect of such an arrangement appears uncertain, particularly under the totalitarian leadership of Xi Jinping. Given this context, advocacy groups have initiated alternative avenues for self-governance, including the recent election of a parliament-in-exile known as the Hong Kong Parliament, with the aim of eradicating CCP governance in Hong Kong (HK Parliament, n.d.). One model frequently cited in such discussions is the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) (formerly the Tibetan Government-in-Exile), which has operated from Dharamsala, India, with the support of the Indian government (McConnell, 2009, 2016). CTA primarily uses English as a working language to

communicate with international bodies and governments, reinforcing CEAP's principles of counter-discourse through English. This section examines two potential models of autonomous government in relation to Hongkongers-in-exile.

The first model, which aligns with conventional academic definitions of a government-in-exile, describes a scenario in which the pre-1997 Hong Kong government continues to operate with its fully elected legislature intact. A government-in-exile is generally understood as a displaced government operating from a host country without jurisdiction over its original territory (McConnell, 2016; Stola, 2012). The exile of elected Hong Kong legislators following the imposition of the National Security Law, combined with their inability to exercise governance over Hong Kong, partially align with this definition. However, unlike the Tibetan example, where an entire governing body went into exile, no single authority or administrative structure from Hong Kong has been formally re-established abroad.

Despite the lack of an existing exile government, parallels can be drawn between Chris Patten, the last governor of Hong Kong, and the Tibetan figurehead, who both have maintained political engagement since losing jurisdiction. Patten was praised by the Dalai Lama as a man of principle prepared to stand up to China. In this sense, Patten came to embody for Hongkongers what the Dalai Lama represents for Tibetans—a moral voice for a territory whose freedoms were under threat (“Patten finds a fan in the Dalai Lama”, 1996). Patten has consistently spoken on Hong Kong's autonomy since 1997, similar to how the Dalai Lama has advocated for Tibetan rights internationally in English since his exile in 1959. Under this model, the newly elected parliament-in-exile could, in theory, invite Patten to take on a leadership or advisory role. Given Patten's continued advocacy and the deep affection many Hongkongers hold for him, it is not inconceivable that an elected parliament-in-exile might seek to appoint Patten as figurehead. In this context, international advocacy for Hong Kong will likely be conducted in English, aligning with the principles of CEAP. Patten's pre-handover democratic reforms, which were largely dismantled after 1997, represent an attempt to fulfil the Joint Declaration's commitment to democratic governance. If such a government-in-exile were established, it could draw on the Tibetan experience as a case study in exile governance (cf. McConnell, 2016).

However, this model presents some practical challenges. Unlike the Dalai Lama, who has remained a central figure in Tibetan political activism, Patten's advanced age and former colonial role may limit his involvement. While many Hongkongers revere Patten as a symbol of Hong Kong's democratic governance, reappointing Patten as leader could reinforce colonial associations, which may or may not align with the movement's vision of Hong Kong's future. Furthermore, the Tibetan Government-in-Exile lacks formal recognition by any state (Görömbölyi, 2022), raising questions about whether a Hong Kong government-in-exile would gain similar or different levels of international legitimacy. Given China's geopolitical influence, formal recognition of such a government-in-exile would likely face significant diplomatic obstacles.

The second model considers an alternative territorial structure that integrates both governance and land allocation within a parliamentary democracy framework. In general terms, a parliamentary democracy functions through an elected legislature where the party securing the most seats forms the government. The United Kingdom has historically hosted exiled governments under special political circumstances. However, these governments were not provided with designated land to accommodate their citizens. In the contemporary context, British policy analysts such as Sam Bowman have explored the possibility that a self-governing entity for Hongkongers could be integrated within the United Kingdom's existing constitutional arrangements (Ebner & Peck, 2022). Ivan Ko of the Victoria Harbor Group has actively engaged with local authorities to explore the feasibility of this initiative. Since 2024, his company has collaborated with Thames Freeport to develop a model for 21st-century urban growth, with the potential for broader application across the United Kingdom (Free Cities Foundation, 2024).

While this partnership remains primarily focused on business-to-government collaboration, questions regarding governance and political autonomy remain unresolved. The autonomy granted within a freeport is strictly economic, designed to attract businesses and investment through financial incentives, rather than to provide genuine self-governing powers. This highlights a fundamental limitation: economic autonomy alone cannot address the political aspirations of displaced Hongkongers. In this context, the newly established Hong Kong Parliament could potentially serve as a governing body, contributing insights on democratic structures and representing the interests of the

Hong Kong diaspora within the evolving framework of the project. The importance of extending autonomy beyond economics is also recognized within British policy debates. The Institute of Economic Affairs, for example, in its *Beyond Freeports* report, contends that Hong Kong-style self-governing cities could revitalize the United Kingdom precisely because they combine economic vitality with innovative governance structures (Kichanova, 2025).

Such an institution could operate within the framework of a British Crown Dependency, which maintains a directly elected legislature and independent judiciary while remaining under British sovereignty (Mut Bosque, 2020). If a Crown Dependency model were pursued, a designated representative, such as a Lieutenant Governor, could oversee governance while ensuring alignment with British legal and diplomatic frameworks. This arrangement would distinguish itself from traditional government-in-exile structures by offering a legally recognized political entity under British jurisdiction.

In response to China's expanding hegemony, advocacy for a "Hong Kong 2.0" presents an alternative model of governance that upholds the foundational principles of Hong Kong. These are described by Patten as a free market, individual liberties, the rule of law, and democratic institutions (Flowerdew, 1997, 2016). While the establishment of a Hong Kong Crown Dependency could create tensions in Sino-British relations, it may also present strategic and economic advantages for the United Kingdom. By positioning itself as a competitive international financial hub, the Crown Dependency could complement the "Global Britain" strategy, offering an alternative model of economic prosperity within a liberal democratic framework (see Bowman, 2020; Hannan, 2020; Macaes, 2020). However, such a move would require careful diplomatic navigation, as China's potential response, including economic or political retaliation, should be weighed against the long-term benefits of fostering financial innovation, attracting international investment, and reinforcing the United Kingdom's global economic influence.

4.3. Pedagogical Potential

The analysis above situates the slogan within the framework of CEAP, as it provides a counter-discourse to the CCP's narrative of reunification. This paper extends CEAP's classroom application by presenting the Crown Dependency model as a conceptual framework, illustrating how discourse can inform civic imagination and critical thinking.

In terms of pedagogical potential, Fenton-Smith (2014) argues that critical pedagogues foster political agency, showing that students "are strong, agentive, and can think for themselves" (p. 30). CEAP activities can help BN(O) Hongkongers develop similar capacities through structured exercises. For example, drawing on Hong Kong protests across the United Kingdom, instructors could design a range of persuasive writing or speaking tasks on topics relevant to their exile, or ask students to analyze the meaning of a slogan or political address within their own sociopolitical contexts.

Regarding assignment output, just as Benesch's students wrote protest letters to New York legislators regarding tuition cuts, BN(O) participants could be supported in drafting public-facing opinion pieces and in analyzing the language of Hong Kong assemblies and protests. In this way, the Crown Dependency model can serve as a conceptual tool for exploring alternative governance, enabling participants to situate hypothetical scenarios alongside real-world examples such as the recently elected Hong Kong Parliament, which often cites the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times" as the basis of its purpose. This approach demonstrates how language learning can intersect with civic awareness and political imagination, allowing students to critically reflect on the implications of self-governance structures outlined in the Joint Declaration.

5. Conclusion

Using CDA, this article has analyzed the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, revolution of our times". The findings suggest that the slogan initially served as a call for Hong Kong independence in response to China's interference in local affairs and the CCP's failure to uphold commitments outlined in the Joint Declaration, particularly regarding representative governance. Following the introduction of the BN(O) scheme, the slogan evolved to reflect the ongoing challenges faced by Hongkongers under political persecution, highlighting broader concerns about political autonomy and civic rights. These developments carry pedagogical implications, as BN(O) exiles in the United Kingdom can engage

with the slogan through CEAP, which provides a framework for fostering critical reflection, civic agency, and imaginative engagement with alternative political possibilities.

While this conceptual study focuses specifically on BN(O) exiles, the Crown Dependency scenario is presented as a hypothetical and pedagogical exercise rather than a prescriptive political blueprint. This limitation acknowledges that CEAP has traditionally been applied to classroom-based civic engagement activities, such as letter writing or local activism. Nevertheless, the framework demonstrates how language, discourse, and agency can be explored conceptually to imagine alternative governance structures, as exemplified by the recently elected Hong Kong Parliament, which reflects Hongkongers' own exercise of agency. The approach may also be relevant to other exiled or stateless communities, such as Tibetans or Uyghurs, who use English for international advocacy, illustrating how CEAP can accommodate interdisciplinary connections between discourse analysis, civic imagination, and pedagogy.

This article contributes a novel perspective by linking CDA with CEAP to examine how a protest slogan, rendered unlawful by the Hong Kong government, continues to function in exile, connecting discourse, civic imagination, and pedagogy. Future research could extend this framework through empirical studies on how BN(O) exiles and other diasporic communities engage with such slogans in practice, or by comparing the discursive imaginaries of Hongkongers with those of other stateless or exiled groups, thereby deepening our understanding of language, power, and civic agency in contexts of transnational repression.

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