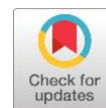


The discursive construction of sedition in contemporary Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how sedition is discursively constructed in Hong Kong through legal and institutional discourse, particularly in relation to publications, and how these constructions reflect changing relationships between political authority, communication, and security across changing constitutional contexts. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study analyses three interconnected processes: the historical recontextualisation of sedition from a Crown-based constitutional framework into a post-handover sovereignty framework; the presuppositions of political authority, belonging, and loyalty embedded within contemporary sedition discourse; and the securitisation of publications and communicative practices. The analysis examines colonial and contemporary sedition-related legal provisions, together with official institutional discourse surrounding recent publication-related investigations. Through the discussion of the Sheep Village case and the 2026 bookstore investigation, the article demonstrates that sedition is not a fixed legal category but a discourse whose meaning changes according to broader constructions of authority and legitimacy. While colonial sedition law was embedded within a framework of loyalty towards the Crown, contemporary sedition discourse presupposes the legitimacy of the post-handover constitutional order and increasingly frames challenges to that order as forms of political disaffection or security risk. The article argues that the transformation of sedition in Hong Kong reflects broader struggles over constitutional identity, political belonging, and the boundaries of legitimate communication.



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1. Introduction

In July 2026, Hong Kong authorities arrested individuals connected with two independent bookstores on suspicion of offences involving seditious intention under the *Safeguarding National Security Ordinance 2024* (Hong Kong). The arrests attracted public attention because the alleged offences concerned the circulation and sale of publications rather than acts involving physical violence, espionage, or material disruption. According to official statements, the individuals were suspected of publishing, displaying, and distributing materials that authorities considered capable of inciting hatred or disaffection against the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) Government and other institutions (Government of the HKSAR, 2026). The case therefore raises

important questions regarding how written texts and the circulation of ideas become constructed as matters of security concern.

The bookstore investigations represent a significant development in the evolving regulation of political expression in Hong Kong. Unlike conventional understandings of national security threats, which often focus on physical acts such as terrorism or sabotage, sedition concerns the relationship between language, political authority, and public perception. A publication may become legally significant not only because of the factual claims it contains, but because of the meanings, emotions, and political interpretations that authorities associate with its circulation. The transformation of a book from a cultural or political text into a potential security object therefore provides an important case for examining the relationship between language, law, and power.

The concept of sedition has a long history within Hong Kong's legal system. Historically, sedition was regulated through sections 9 and 10 of the *Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 200) 1971* (Hong Kong), provisions inherited from the British colonial legal framework. These provisions defined "seditious intention" through concepts including bringing the government into hatred or contempt, exciting disaffection, undermining the administration of justice, and encouraging unlawful change. Following the enactment of the *Safeguarding National Security Ordinance 2024* (Hong Kong), these provisions were repealed and replaced by a new statutory framework that incorporated sedition into Hong Kong's contemporary national security regime. Although the terminology of sedition has been retained, its operation now exists within a substantially different political and constitutional context.

The significance of sedition lies not only in the legal consequences attached to it, but also in the processes through which certain forms of expression are classified as dangerous. Terms such as "seditious intention", "hatred", and "disaffection" appear to provide objective descriptions of harmful conduct; however, their application requires interpretation concerning the boundary between legitimate criticism and unacceptable opposition. Such categories therefore provide an important site for examining how language constructs relationships between authority, legitimacy, and political expression.

Scholarship on Hong Kong has demonstrated that political authority and collective identity are not only produced through institutional arrangements but also through discourse. Within the field of Critical Discourse Analysis, John Flowerdew's extensive research has shown how political language has shaped competing understandings of Hong Kong's identity and constitutional position across different historical periods. His studies have examined the discursive construction of political values (Flowerdew, 1997), national identity (Flowerdew, 2004, 2016), patriotic narratives (Flowerdew & Leong, 2007), and changing political identities through critical discourse historiography (Flowerdew, 2011). Further analysis of political metaphors during the 2014 Occupy Movement demonstrated how competing narratives of conflict and legitimacy were constructed through language (Flowerdew, 2017). This body of research established that political struggles in Hong Kong are simultaneously struggles over meaning, identity, and legitimacy.

Subsequent research has extended this approach by examining how different actors employ discourse to construct competing understandings of citizenship, belonging, and political authority. Studies have analysed the discursive construction of civic identity in official policy communication (Wang, 2017), the localisation of political narratives within Hong Kong's public sphere (Ng, 2020), and the negotiation of Hong Kong identity among transnational communities (W. Tang, 2014). These studies highlight that language does not simply reflect existing political relationships; rather, it actively contributes to defining the boundaries of political membership and acceptable forms of belonging. More recent scholarship has extended this discourse-oriented approach to the post-2019 national security context, examining the construction of patriotism, historical narratives, and political symbolism in Hong Kong (e.g., Iu, 2025a, 2025b; Leung, 2024; A. Tang, 2022; Wong, 2024, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c, 2025d, 2026d). This research collectively demonstrates the continuing importance of discourse in shaping political meanings and boundaries of acceptable expression under changing political and legal conditions.

This understanding of discourse and power is relevant to language education because institutional texts require readers to interpret specialised terminology, identify assumptions, evaluate claims, and examine how linguistic choices construct authority and legitimacy. Critical approaches to language education have emphasised the relationship between language learning, institutional contexts, and questions of power and participation (Benesch, 1996; Chun, 2015). In this sense, politically and legally complex texts can serve as material for developing critical reading and language awareness without requiring the teaching of a particular political position.

While existing studies have examined the discursive construction of sovereignty, identity, and political legitimacy, less attention has been paid to the linguistic processes through which expressions, publications, and communicative practices become classified as security concerns. In particular, the category of “sedition” provides an important site for examining how legal and institutional discourse transforms acts of communication into potential threats. This article addresses the gap by analysing how seditious intention is constructed through legal definitions, official statements, and the regulation of publications. This paper asks: How is sedition discursively constructed in Hong Kong through legal and institutional discourse, particularly in relation to publications, and how do these constructions reflect changing relationships between political authority, communication, and security across different constitutional periods?

2. Method

This study adopts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to examine how sedition is constructed through legal and institutional discourse in contemporary Hong Kong. CDA is concerned not only with the linguistic features of texts but also with the ways in which discourse contributes to the production of social meanings, political identities, and relations of power (Statham, 2022). Accordingly, this study analyses how linguistic choices, institutional descriptions, and patterns of categorisation construct relationships between communication, political authority, and security.

The corpus consists of three categories of texts. The first comprises the historical sedition provisions contained in sections 9 and 10 of the *Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 200)* (Department of Justice, 2023), which formed part of Hong Kong’s colonial legal framework. The second consists of the contemporary provisions concerning seditious intention under the *Safeguarding National Security Ordinance 2024* (Hong Kong). The third consists of the official police statement issued by the National Security Department in relation to the July 2026 bookstore investigation (Government of the HKSAR, 2026). Rather than analysing the substantive content of the publications involved, the study focuses on the discursive processes through which publications and their circulation become framed as security-related concerns.

While CDA approaches generally acknowledge the significance of historical context in discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Fairclough, 2010), this study specifically draws on Flowerdew’s (2017) Critical Discourse Historiography (CDH) framework. CDH is particularly suitable for this research because it examines how discourse contributes to the construction, preservation, and transformation of historical meanings. Instead of viewing political concepts as possessing fixed meanings across time, CDH investigates how their significance is reinterpreted within changing historical and institutional contexts.

This framework is especially relevant to the study of sedition in Hong Kong because the legal category has developed across different constitutional periods. The analysis therefore considers how concepts associated with sedition, political authority, and loyalty are constructed within the colonial legal order and subsequently recontextualised within the post-handover national security framework. The retention of legal terminology does not necessarily imply the continuation of identical political meanings; instead, it raises questions regarding how historical legal concepts are linguistically adapted to new political circumstances.

The analysis proceeds through three interconnected dimensions. First, it examines the historical construction of loyalty within sedition discourse by tracing how a legal category originally embedded within a Crown-based constitutional order has been interpreted across different constitutional periods

in Hong Kong. Particular attention is given to how references to political authority and loyalty are constructed within colonial-era sedition provisions and subsequently reinterpreted after the transfer of sovereignty. Second, it examines the presuppositions underlying contemporary sedition discourse, focusing on how legal categories such as “seditious intention”, “hatred”, and “disaffection” are constructed within the post-handover constitutional framework. This analysis considers how the legitimacy of political authority is embedded within legal discourse and how particular understandings of sovereignty, belonging, and political order shape the interpretation of harmful expression. Third, it analyses the securitisation of communication by examining how publications and communicative practices are transformed into objects of security concern. Recontextualisation is considered across these dimensions to trace how the earlier sedition framework is incorporated into the contemporary national security regime and how its meaning is adapted within a changed constitutional and institutional context.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. The Recontextualisation of Sedition in Post-Handover Hong Kong

The first finding concerns the transformation of the political referent protected by sedition discourse. Although the concept of sedition has been retained across Hong Kong’s constitutional transition, the historical assumptions embedded within the original colonial provisions differ significantly from the political meanings attached to their contemporary application. The continuity of legal terminology obscures a deeper transformation in the relationship between authority, loyalty, and political legitimacy.

The application of this inherited legal category in the post-handover period raises questions regarding how the protected object of sedition is discursively reconstructed. The *Sheep Village* case provides an illustrative example (Chan, 2022). Although the defendants in the *Sheep Village* case were charged under section 10(1)(c) of the *Crimes Ordinance (Cap. 200) 1971 (Hong Kong)* for publishing a seditious publication, section 10 was inseparable from the definition of “seditious intention” contained in section 9. The determination of whether a publication was seditious therefore depended upon the interpretation of a provision whose original wording reflected the constitutional order of colonial Hong Kong.

Section 9(a) of the Crimes Ordinance defined a seditious intention as an intention “to bring into hatred or contempt or to excite disaffection against the person of Her Majesty, or Her Heirs or Successors”. This wording reveals the historical assumptions embedded within the offence: political authority was represented through the Crown, and the relevant political community was constructed through the relationship between the monarch, the colonial government, and the inhabitants of Hong Kong. Sedition, within this framework, was not simply opposition to a government policy; it was a legal category concerned with maintaining loyalty to the British constitutional order.

The publication was prosecuted under the sedition provisions, yet its symbolic structure did not straightforwardly correspond with the historical object protected by the colonial offence. The narrative constructed the shepherd figure, interpreted as representing Chris Patten, the last British Governor of Hong Kong, as a positive figure, while the wolves represented the HKSAR Government as the source of threat and oppression (Wong, 2026c). Therefore, when assessed against the historical meaning of section 9, the publication presented a complicated relationship with the original object of protection: it appeared to defend, rather than denigrate, the constitutional order.

The resulting tension arises because the publication’s portrayal of the HKSAR Government as the wolves places contemporary political authority in the position associated with the threat, rather than the protection, of the political community. If the post-handover political order is understood as having inherited the authority protected by the colonial sedition provision, the symbolic structure of the publication therefore produces an uncomfortable representation: the authority that now claims the protected political position is represented as the wolves, while the former British authority is represented as the Shepherd who protects the sheep. In other words, the post-handover political authority is expected to occupy the position of the Shepherd, yet the publication represents Chris

Patten, as the former Crown representative, in that role while portraying the HKSAR Government as the wolves. The publication therefore constructed the former political order as protective and the new political authority as threatening, a representation that provided the basis for interpreting the publication as expressing disaffection towards the post-handover order.

The prosecution of the case proceeded on the basis that the publications possessed a seditious intention. This required the inherited legal category to be understood within a post-handover constitutional context. In other words, although the statutory language retained references to “Her Majesty, or Her Heirs or Successors”, the political authority protected by the offence was no longer interpreted solely through the historical Crown-based framework in which the provision originated. Instead, the meaning of sedition was recontextualised through a new sovereignty discourse in which challenges to contemporary political authority could be incorporated within the scope of the offence.

The controversy surrounding the case therefore illustrates a broader process of historical recontextualisation. The contemporary application of sedition requires an implicit relocation of the object of protection: from the Crown-based constitutional order embedded in the original legal language to the institutions and political arrangements of the post-handover order. This continuity is achieved through the assumption that the legal category can be carried across constitutional contexts while acquiring new political meanings.

This creates a tension between two competing historical narratives. One narrative constructs 1997 as a legal and constitutional continuation in which inherited institutions and laws remain valid under a new sovereign framework. The alternative narrative, represented by texts such as *Sheep Village*, constructs the pre-handover order as a distinct political arrangement whose values and institutions may be nostalgically contrasted with the post-handover system. The significance of the case therefore lies not only in the prosecution of an individual publication, but in the competing discursive constructions of which political order constitutes the legitimate object of protection.

This process also raises a broader question concerning interpretive asymmetry within sedition discourse. The prosecution of symbolic publications depends upon attributing political meanings that are not stated explicitly within the texts themselves. In the *Sheep Village* case, the allegorical representation of social actors was interpreted as carrying political implications beyond the literal narrative, including the identification of the wolves with the HKSAR Government. This identification was produced through judicial interpretation rather than established solely by the text. The application of the inherited sedition provision likewise required an interpretation of the legal text, since the original reference to “Her Majesty, or Her Heirs or Successors” had to be understood within a post-handover political order.

The case therefore demonstrates the unequal institutional status given to these interpretations. The political meaning attributed to the publication was treated as evidence of seditious intention, while the reinterpretation of the authority protected by the inherited law was treated as a matter of legal continuity. Yet both involved the attribution of political meaning: the first determined what the book was understood to mean, while the second determined whom the law was understood to protect. This asymmetry makes institutional authority to assign political meaning a central dimension of contemporary sedition discourse. This asymmetry arises because the judgment accepted the legitimacy of the post-handover political authority as a presupposed basis of legal interpretation, while treating the publication’s alternative representation of that authority as evidence of illegitimate opposition.

There is, however, a central irony in the judgment. If the HKSAR Government is treated as the successor referred to in the old sedition law, then the book cannot reasonably be said to bring the Crown into contempt: the Shepherd is portrayed positively, while the wolves are portrayed negatively (Wong, 2026c). The result is an apparent inversion of the original legal logic: a law historically designed to protect the Crown is reinterpreted as protecting the wolves.

This inversion can be situated within a broader pattern of political discourse associated with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), in which competing interpretations of political events are managed

by reversing the roles of victim and perpetrator, legitimacy and illegitimacy. The events of June 4, 1989 provide a particularly consequential example: the state has consistently rejected interpretations of the military crackdown as a massacre and instead framed the political unrest and those who participated in it as threats to social and political order (Wong, 2024, 2025b, 2026d). In other words, within official Chinese government discourse, the distinction between benevolence and wrongdoing is inverted, so that patriots are recast as perpetrators, while those responsible for the mass killing of citizens are positioned as defenders of political order. The relevance of this pattern for the present case is not that the two events are equivalent, but that both demonstrate how institutional discourse can reverse the direction of political responsibility. In the *Sheep Village* case, this reversal is especially striking because the publication itself portrayed the Crown favourably, yet the legal interpretation treated this expression of affection towards the Shepherd as wrongdoing, while the invading wolves were deemed worthy of protection under sedition law.

3.2. Recontextualising Sedition through National Security Discourse

The second finding examines how the meaning of sedition has been transformed through its incorporation into Hong Kong's contemporary national security framework. Under the colonial Crimes Ordinance, sedition was primarily constructed as an offence concerning disaffection towards established authority, including the Crown, the government, and the administration of justice. Although the offence restricted certain forms of political expression, its legal discourse reflected a public order framework rather than the contemporary language of national security.

This distinction becomes clearer after the 2019 protest movement and the subsequent expansion of national security discourse in Hong Kong. Following the enactment of the *Safeguarding National Security Ordinance* in 2024, sedition became explicitly situated within a broader framework concerned with sovereignty, constitutional order, and security. As a result, concepts such as "hatred", "contempt", and "disaffection" are no longer interpreted only through the maintenance of established authority, but increasingly through whether forms of communication are perceived as challenging the sovereignty claims and political legitimacy of the state.

This transformation matters because the terminology of sedition has remained historically continuous while the discourse surrounding it has changed. The same legal category has therefore acquired different political meanings across constitutional contexts. Under the colonial order, sedition was linguistically organised around loyalty to a Crown-based constitutional arrangement. In the contemporary national security framework, however, the category is embedded within a discourse that prioritises the protection of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the constitutional relationship between Hong Kong and the Chinese state.

The issue is further complicated by the relationship between sedition and political membership. In many constitutional systems, restrictions on disaffection towards the state are understood within a framework of citizenship, national membership, or a clearly defined relationship between individuals and the political community. Hong Kong presents a more complex case because its population has historically included individuals whose identities and affiliations do not map neatly onto a single national framework. The existence of British National (Overseas) status and other transnational forms of belonging demonstrates that political identity in Hong Kong cannot be reduced solely to membership within the Chinese state. Consequently, the application of sedition discourse raises a deeper question concerning the basis upon which political loyalty is presumed: whether it derives from residence, citizenship, historical affiliation, constitutional status, or acceptance of the prevailing sovereignty narrative.

This tension reflects a broader issue in the construction of political identity during the Sino-British negotiations over Hong Kong's future. Official Chinese discourse distorted realities and framed Hong Kong residents as members of the Chinese nation, regardless of their historical, legal, or political affiliations under British colonial rule (Wong, 2025a). In this process, categories such as nationality, sovereignty, and belonging were reinterpreted through the framework of territorial unity and national identity. This involved not merely a transfer of sovereignty, but also a discursive reconstruction of who Hong Kong people were understood to be and what political obligations were

presumed to follow from that identity. The contemporary application of sedition discourse continues to rely upon this underlying assumption: that sovereignty transfer necessarily produced a corresponding transfer of political loyalty and that alternative understandings of identity represent challenges to the legitimate constitutional order.

The reconstruction of sedition after 2019 must therefore be understood as more than the continuation of an inherited offence. It represents a transformation in the discourse through which harmful communication is defined. The movement from a public order framework to a national security framework changes not only the object of protection but also the assumptions underlying political loyalty, belonging, and legitimate expression. Sedition consequently functions as a site where competing understandings of sovereignty and constitutional identity are negotiated.

3.3. The Securitisation of Communication

The third finding examines how the regulation of publications has been further transformed through the incorporation of sedition into Hong Kong's national security framework. Whereas the *Sheep Village* case involved the prosecution of a publication as a seditious object under the Crimes Ordinance, the 2026 bookstore investigation demonstrates a broader securitisation of communication, in which the production, circulation, and display of publications are increasingly framed through the language of national security.

The distinction between the two cases reveals an important difference in how sedition is constructed. In the *Sheep Village* judgment, the central legal question concerned whether an allegorical publication possessed a seditious intention. The court therefore focused on the relationship between textual representation, symbolic meaning, and the presumed effects of the publication on readers. The publication acquired its legal meaning through an interpretive process in which political meanings were attributed to its characters, narrative structure, and historical references. The 2026 police statement further extends this securitisation by situating publishing activities explicitly within Hong Kong's national security framework. While the *Sheep Village* case also involved the construction of a publication as politically harmful, this concern was expressed through the language of sedition under the Crimes Ordinance rather than through an explicit national security framework. The 2026 police statement, by contrast, operates within the institutional language of national security, describing the intercepted materials as "books with seditious intention" (para. 1, 3) and alleging that the publications involved "inciting hatred against the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, the judiciary, and law enforcement agencies" (para. 3). Importantly, the alleged offence concerns not only the content of the publications but also the acts of displaying and selling those publications. Communication itself is therefore incorporated into the construction of a potential security concern.

This represents a further transformation in the discourse of sedition. In the *Sheep Village* case, the prosecution and judgment concerned a specific publication whose content was publicly available and whose alleged political meaning was examined through the judicial process. By contrast, in the 2026 bookstore investigation, the authorities have not disclosed the titles or contents of the publications allegedly involved. The public is therefore unable to examine independently why these materials are considered seditious or how the alleged harm is constructed. Sedition discourse has consequently moved beyond the interpretation of a particular text towards a broader regulation of publishing practices themselves, where displaying, selling, or circulating publications may be treated as security-related concerns based on institutional assessments that remain largely inaccessible to the public.

This development demonstrates how communication is transformed into a security issue through legal and institutional discourse. A publication does not possess a security threat in itself; rather, it becomes treated as a threat when authorities interpret its content, circulation, or possible influence as harmful to the political order. In this way, the meaning of publishing changes: activities that would normally be understood as forms of political expression or public discussion are reclassified as matters requiring state intervention.

The securitisation of sedition also reveals the presupposition of constitutional legitimacy embedded within this discourse. The classification of communication as a security threat assumes that the claimed constitutional order being protected represents an accepted and legitimate framework of political authority. However, Hong Kong's constitutional development under the Sino-British Joint Declaration has been characterised by competing interpretations of sovereignty, autonomy, and political identity. While Chinese official discourse emphasises Hong Kong's status as "an inalienable part" of China and presents challenges to this position as threats to national security, British official discourse has emphasised the autonomy commitments contained within the Joint Declaration and the distinct historical development of Hong Kong's political community (Wong, 2026b).

This tension reveals that securitised sedition discourse does not merely regulate harmful expression; it also reinforces a particular interpretation of the constitutional order as the legitimate framework within which communication must operate. Expressions that challenge this interpretation may therefore be repositioned from political disagreement into security concerns. Seditious discourse consequently functions not only as a mechanism for regulating communication, but also as a means through which particular understandings of sovereignty, legitimacy, and political belonging are constructed and maintained.

3.4. Constitutional Identity and Imagining a Parallel Hong Kong

The findings suggest that contemporary sedition discourse in Hong Kong reflects a deeper contest over the relationship between political authority, constitutional identity, and communication. The transformation of sedition from a Crown-based public order offence into a national security-oriented framework illustrates how legal categories are shaped by broader narratives of sovereignty and legitimacy. Instead of representing a purely technical evolution of criminal law, the changing discourse of sedition reflects competing understandings of the constitutional order within which political expression is permitted. This tension is particularly significant because constitutional arrangements are not sustained only through legal texts; they also depend upon shared understandings of political membership and authority.

The 2026 bookstore investigation therefore raises broader questions concerning the relationship between legality, transparency, and the historical development of Hong Kong's political institutions. Although the investigation was conducted through formal legal procedures, the refusal to disclose the publications allegedly involved limits the ability of the public to independently evaluate why those materials were classified as seditious. This represents a significant transformation from the earlier legal environment in which publications and political expression operated within a comparatively open public sphere shaped by British legal traditions, civil liberties, and developing forms of political participation. Under British sovereignty, Hong Kong developed institutional practices associated with liberal governance, including an independent judiciary, a vibrant civil society, and relatively extensive space for public debate.

This transformation does not merely restrict particular forms of expression; it also reshapes the conditions under which citizens can debate the legitimacy of political authority itself. When the state determines that certain publications constitute threats while withholding the basis for that determination from public scrutiny, the capacity for democratic evaluation and contestation is weakened. In the context of Hong Kong's contested constitutional development, this raises broader questions about whether political stability can be sustained through security regulation alone, or whether it requires constitutional arrangements capable of accommodating the territory's historical institutions, identities, and aspirations for autonomy.

Against this background, proposals for alternative constitutional arrangements, including discussions of a possible Hong Kong Crown Dependency on British soil, can be understood as responses to unresolved questions concerning institutional identity and political legitimacy (Wong, 2026a; see also Ebner & Peck, 2022; Wong, 2025d). The proposal represents attempts to imagine constitutional frameworks that reconcile Hong Kong's historical connections, autonomy aspirations, and contemporary political realities. Its significance lies in demonstrating that debates surrounding

sedition and security are ultimately connected to broader questions about how political communities define themselves and the authority structures through which they are governed.

The experience of Tibetan exile communities provides a comparative example of how political identities may be maintained and reconstructed through discourse, education, and institutional practices under conditions of contested sovereignty (McConnell, 2009, 2016). While the Chinese state presents Tibet as historically and constitutionally belonging to China, Tibetan exile institutions have developed alternative narratives of history, identity, and political community through educational and cultural institutions (Wong, 2026c). This demonstrates that political legitimacy is not produced solely through territorial control or state institutions; it is also constructed through narratives, collective memory, and educational practices. For Hong Kong, this comparison highlights the broader question of how communities respond when competing constitutional narratives coexist. The significance of exile institutions lies not necessarily in reproducing a particular political model, but in demonstrating how language, education, and historical discourse become central mechanisms through which communities negotiate identity, belonging, and political legitimacy.

The broader implication of this study is that regulation of expression cannot be separated from the constitutional narratives within which expression is interpreted. When political disagreement is primarily understood through the language of security, disputes over identity, sovereignty, and legitimacy may be transformed into questions of threat and loyalty. Understanding sedition discourse therefore requires attention not only to the restriction of communication, but also to the competing constitutional meanings that make such restrictions possible.

The analysis also has implications for critical language awareness in advanced language education. Legal and institutional texts such as those examined here can provide opportunities for learners to examine how political authority, legitimacy, and security are constructed through language. In particular, attention to presuppositions, the recontextualisation of legal concepts, and the framing of communication as a security concern can support critical reading of complex texts without requiring learners to adopt a particular political position. For example, learners may examine how concepts such as “sovereignty”, “security”, and “legitimacy” acquire different meanings across historical and institutional contexts. Such an approach encourages learners to examine how meanings are constructed, what assumptions texts contain, and how the same concepts may acquire different meanings across historical and institutional contexts.

4. Conclusion

This article has examined how sedition is discursively constructed in Hong Kong through legal and institutional discourse, particularly in relation to publications, and how these constructions reflect changing relationships between political authority, communication, and security across changing constitutional contexts. Rather than treating sedition as a fixed legal category with a stable meaning, the analysis has demonstrated that its interpretation is shaped by broader political and constitutional narratives.

The findings demonstrate three interconnected transformations. First, the historical construction of sedition reveals how an offence originally embedded within a Crown-based constitutional order was carried forward into a post-handover context in which the meaning of political authority was rearticulated. Second, the analysis shows that contemporary sedition discourse relies upon presuppositions concerning the legitimacy of the political order being protected, as well as assumptions about the relationship between individuals, belonging, and political loyalty. Third, the analysis illustrates how sedition has become increasingly securitised, with publications and communicative practices being transformed from matters of political expression into objects of national security concern.

By applying a critical discourse historiographical approach, this study contributes to understanding how legal categories function not only as instruments of regulation but also as mechanisms through which political meanings are constructed. Terms such as “seditious intention”, “disaffection”, and “security” do not operate independently from historical context; rather, their

meanings are produced through institutional interpretations that reflect particular understandings of sovereignty, authority, and social order.

The case of Hong Kong demonstrates that disputes over speech regulation cannot be separated from broader questions concerning constitutional identity and political legitimacy. When communication is interpreted through the framework of sedition and security, disagreements over history, sovereignty, and belonging may be transformed into questions of threat and loyalty. Examining sedition discourse therefore requires attention not only to the regulation of expression, but also to the competing constitutional narratives through which political authority is understood and maintained.

From an ELT perspective, this analysis also highlights the importance of understanding language as a form of social and political practice. English education is not limited to the acquisition of linguistic competence, but also involves engagement with texts, identities, and the social contexts in which communication takes place. In politically contested environments, critical approaches to ELT require attention to how language is used to construct meanings, represent identities, and negotiate relationships of power. The Hong Kong case therefore illustrates the broader relevance of critical language education in examining how communication, identity, and authority intersect beyond the classroom.

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- | | | |
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