

# From Mass Protests To National Security: A Critical Analysis Of Carrie Lam's Political Responses During The 2019 Hong Kong Protests

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**Abstract:** This article provides a critical discourse analysis of the political speeches of Hong Kong Chief Executive Carrie Lam in the handling of the 2019 Hong Kong protests that led to the Chinese imposition of the National Security Law in 2020. While acknowledging the widely recognized mishandling of the extradition Bill as the root cause of the events, the aim here is to explore the complexities of Lam's decision-making against a backdrop of external and internal pressures she faced. Using applied linguistics methods, this critical analysis is intended to deepen understanding of the Chief Executive's underlying beliefs and values that led to the political crisis. It is conducted with the understanding that such insights can contribute to a broader discussion about liberal principles and governance under the 'one country, two systems' framework in post-colonial Hong Kong. With the recent enactment of Article 23 that supplements the National Security Law, this is a timely article about how the political discourses of the then Chief Executive caused the escalation of the protests leading to the Chinese imposition of a draconian law that is widely seen as a violation of the Sino-British Joint Declaration.

**Keywords:** Hong Kong, Carrie Lam, National Security Law, extradition Bill, critical discourse analysis, political speeches, post-colonial applied linguistics

## 1. Introduction

It is widely viewed that the imposition of the National Security Law in Hong Kong in 2020 was a direct result of Chief Executive Carrie Lam's mishandling of the *Fugitive Offenders and Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters Legislation (Amendment) Bill 2019* (the Bill) (Legislative Council of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China 2019) that had led the prolonged protests (Purbrick 2019). Notable media have certainly cast Lam in that light. During a press conference at the height of the 2019 protests, angry reporters said many residents wished Lam dead (AFP News Agency 2019:1:20). The Atlantic portrays Lam as 'the leader who killed her city' (McLaughlin 2020). Wolfson College revoked Lam's honorary fellowship for failing to protect human rights and freedom of expression (Wolfson College Cambridge 2020). The children's trilogy *Sheep Village* portrays Lam as the 'big bad wolf' and the Hongkongers as sheep defending their home (Wong B. 2022). Chris Patten, the last governor of Hong Kong, has called Carrie Lam a 'quisling' (Hong Kong Watch 2022:7:02) for betraying Hong Kong's values.

It is, however, important to acknowledge the difficult position that Lam was in. The protests of 2019 were arguably the most difficult of all transformative events in the history of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) that a Chief Executive had to face. Using critical discourse analysis, this article provides a critical reading of Lam's motivation and intention than what has been presented in the media. It examines Lam's public speeches to uncover patterns and themes that reveal her underlying beliefs and values.

## 2. The background

When British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher visited China in September 1982 to kick off a series of negotiations with China over the question of Hong Kong, Deng Xiaoping took a pragmatic approach to recovering Hong Kong. Deng told Thatcher that sovereignty over Hong Kong was not open to negotiation. However, because of the different political and economic realities in Hong Kong, China was willing to maintain Hong Kong's system after the handover of sovereignty on July 1, 1997. This arrangement later became known as the 'one country, two systems' framework. In the Sino-British Joint Declaration signed in 1984, China had promised that after the United Kingdom handed its sovereignty over Hong Kong to China, Hong Kong would keep its own institutions and way of life for fifty years. The agreed basic policies would be stipulated in the Basic Law, Hong Kong's mini constitution, in which Article 23 states that Hong Kong shall enact its own security legislation, a constitutional duty which the HKSAR had previously failed to fulfil because of mass resistance to the legislation.

In 2018, a 20-year-old Hong Kong man known as Chan Tong-kai had murdered his pregnant girlfriend while holidaying in Taiwan. He then avoided Taiwanese authorities and returned to Hong Kong. Although the fugitive had later surrendered himself to Hong Kong police, he could not be charged with murder in Hong Kong. Because of the 'one country, two systems' formula, existing Hong Kong laws did not have a surrender of fugitive arrangement with other parts of China, of which the HKSAR government had included Taiwan. This legal loophole provided the government a rationale to announce in February 2019 that it intended to amend the existing laws to address the present problem (Purbrick 2019). The parents of the murdered girl, Mr and Mrs Poon, had written numerous letters to the government, including to the then Chief Executive of the HKSAR Carrie Lam, seeking help. Lam's response was one of compassion and justice. Lam said at the time:

The parents of the victim have not stopped writing letters to the government. There were five addressed to me. They were still writing this January. If you have read these letters from Mr and Mrs Poon, you would also feel that we must try to help them (Cheng 2019: para. 7).

The Bill introduced by Lam's administration would have sent fugitives across the border to the Chinese mainland. However, the Bill would have returned not only fugitives, but also political dissidents as well as businesspeople who have committed white-collar

crimes in the mainland where the legal system is different to the common law system of Hong Kong (Purbrick 2019). Although the Bill had created a lot of concerns from diverse sections of Hong Kong society and a protest march of a million people was organised on June 9, the government pressed ahead with the Bill's second reading on June 12. However, because the protesters had blocked the legislators from entering the government building on the day, the government announced that it would reschedule the second reading of the Bill. On June 15, Chief Executive Lam announced the Bill would be suspended, but the unfolding political crisis created by the murder case and the Bill that addressed the loophole would not be defused. In fact, it later escalated to a national security crisis and a foreign affairs issue. On June 16, two million people had joined another protest.

Weekly protests subsequently happened in various locations across Hong Kong that led to violent clashes with the police. Protesters broke into the Legislature building on the anniversary of the handover and graffitied the wall with the slogan 是你教我和平遊行是沒用 [it was you who taught me peaceful marches are useless]. According to Purbrick (2019), the grievances had extended to other long-standing issues such as square dancing and cross-border parallel trading activities of mainlanders in Hong Kong. Anti-mainland sentiments were felt deeply amongst the people of Hong Kong. The Hong Kong protesters made five demands to the government, one of which was the withdrawal of the Bill.

Although Chief Executive Lam had told the press on July 9 that 'the Bill is dead' (Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2019a), in reality this did not mean that the Bill had been withdrawn and it could be reactivated later (Purbrick 2019). This led to further distrust of the HKSAR government by the Hong Kong public. On July 21, protesters symbolically attacked the central government by defacing the emblem of the PRC. Meanwhile, white clad thugs indiscriminately attacked protesters and passengers arriving in the Yuen Long MTR that night, but no police officers arrived at the scene until 39 minutes later, leading the public to accuse the police of colluding with the triads. Finally, after having no political solutions for months, the HKSAR government met one of the protesters' demands—the withdrawal of the Bill—on September 4, to help move society forward (Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2019c).

But the protests continued. The then Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in the United Kingdom took soft partisanship with the protest movement, and Hong Kong Watch coordinated meetings between Hong Kong activists and United Kingdom politicians (Summers 2022). University campuses became the new war zone. The grounds of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University became the most violent battlefield as protesters barricaded themselves inside the campus for days. The young man at the centre of the murder case that triggered the crisis later apologized to the public and said he was willing to travel to Taiwan to face sentencing. But the HKSAR government did not allow Taiwanese law enforcement authorities to come to Hong Kong and escort him back to Taiwan, citing the action would be disrespectful to the HKSAR's judicial power (Wong T. 2019). Finally, after the district council elections on November 24, the protests seemed to have subsided and declined by December (Summers 2022). The people of Hong Kong

had collectively voted for the pro-democracy representatives in the local elections that drew an unprecedented voter turnout (Wong S. H. et al. 2023). According to Summers (2022), the coronavirus disease had by then taken hold of the attention of the people of Hong Kong.

The murder case that resulted in the prolonged anti-extradition protests had by now escalated to a national level. As a result, the National People's Congress decided on May 28, 2020, to enhance the legal system to safeguard national security in the HKSAR. Subsequently, the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region*, commonly known as the National Security Law, was promulgated in the HKSAR on June 30, 2020 (Hong Kong e-Legislation 2020).

### 3. Brief Review of Literature

Hong Kong political discourses have been a topic of interest in applied linguistics research. As far back as 2002, a study has investigated English major students' conception of their post-colonial identity (Jackson 2002). The study identified metaphors of family in conveying their emotions about the handover of sovereignty to China. In more recent times, John Flowerdew has been a prominent contributor to the analysis of political discourses of Hong Kong's leaders. Flowerdew has analysed the discourses of the last colonial governor Chris Patten in the creation of the four bedrock principles of Hong Kong (Flowerdew 1997, 2016), the discursive construction of the Chinese identity by Hong Kong's first Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa in post-colonial Hong Kong (Flowerdew 2004), and the metaphoric construction of patriotism in Hong Kong (Flowerdew & Leong 2007). Flowerdew (2017) argues that identity in Hong Kong has been established because of resistance against the authorities. Flowerdew's 2017 study has identified metaphors of war and conflict during the Occupy movement. Flowerdew's (2011) volume, *Critical Discourse Analysis in Historiography: The Case of Hong Kong's Evolving Political Identity*, brings together his papers before and after the handover of sovereignty to show how Hong Kong's political discourses have evolved from the colonial administration to the post-colonial administration. Ng T. W. C. (2020) analyses how Beijing's voice has been recontextualised by Hong Kong's third Chief Executive C. Y. Leung and the pro-democracy camp. Another applied linguistics volume, *Discursive Strategies and Identity Construction: A Study Based on the PAs of the HK Governments Pre- and Post- Transition* (Wang 2017), examines twenty-two policy addresses in the discursive construction of Hong Kong's identity in the colonial and post-colonial governments.

However, there is a lack of discourse studies examining the political discourses of Carrie Lam, particularly in relation to the 2019 Hong Kong protests that led to the National Security Law. Lim (2018) has written a brief political biographical history of Carrie Lam, Hong Kong's fourth Chief Executive and first female leader of Hong Kong, and various studies from different academic fields have accounted for the 2019 protests (e.g. Purbrick 2019; Summers 2022). The present study fills the gap in the post-colonial

linguistics literature. It contributes to the understanding of how Carrie Lam's political discourses, shaped by her beliefs about justice and the rule of law, relate to the political context that led to the imposition of the National Security Law, and how they reflect the growing influence of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) hegemony over Hong Kong.

#### **4. Methodology**

This documentary study analyses selected speeches<sup>1</sup> of Carrie Lam during her tenure as Chief Executive of the HKSAR. Documentary research is a broad term covering data contained in traditional documents as well as social media such as YouTube videos. Apart from the ease of access, 'documents are excellent data to understand society' (Grant 2019:4). Instead of obtaining the data through traditional research methods such as semi-structured interviews and ethnographies, in documentary research the data are obtained through existing documents.

This article forms part of a larger project about Hong Kong's political identity. With regards specifically to the socio-political events in Hong Kong leading up to the imposition of the National Security Law, as a Hongkonger I had been exposed to them personally and they were reported in the digital media. I watched and read about those events on the Internet as they unfolded. At the beginning of the present project and throughout, data that I felt were relevant to the project were searched and collected. The documents and YouTube videos were downloaded and information from websites were printed into PDF. Segments of videos that I felt could be used for critical discourse analysis were transcribed manually.

The collected data were analysed using critical discourse analysis (CDA). This analysis method first emerged in the 1970s as an approach in applied linguistics (Ng T. W. C. 2020). It is a qualitative approach that seeks to understand power relations in the social context of the discourse and challenge inequalities (Grant 2019). With regards to power, it can be understood in two dimensions. The non-scholarly contexts view power as domination that enacts power from above through institutions such as the law (Statham 2022). According to Statham, states secure compliance of their subjects through dominance and control. This dominance and control are exerted through state institutions that have the power to punish resistance and dissent. The second type of power, according to Statham, views hegemony as persuading the subordinate groups that the values of the state are legitimate. Discourse plays a pivotal role in this legitimisation process. The totalitarian-party state, for example, legitimises its power by persuading the public that Hong Kong's sovereignty now belongs to China, and any talk about Hong Kong's right to become an independent state is therefore illegitimate. This kind of hegemonic discourse has been forced upon the Hongkongers by the state since Britain transferred its sovereignty over Hong Kong to the PRC in 1997. Social interactions then construct meaning and reality (Phillips N. & Hardy 2002). For instance, while a cultural identification of the Chinese may seem obvious and natural, the term is an artefact of a

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Carrie Lam spoke in English. Her English speeches are quoted verbatim.

particular society. When Carrie Lam became the Chief Executive of the HKSAR, she wanted to foster a sense of Chinese identity from as early as kindergarten amidst competing discourses of Hong Kong independence (Ng J. 2017). The notion of the ‘Chinese’, therefore, is constructed through social interactions rather than taken for granted. The data thus must be interpreted by considering the local contexts.

CDA has been used in studies of socio-cultural and political discourses in Hong Kong (e.g. Flowerdew 2004, 2017; Flowerdew & Leong 2007; Ng T. W. C. 2020) and textual analysis of the controversial Liberal Studies teaching and learning materials in Hong Kong (e.g. Wu 2020). John Flowerdew has made many notable contributions to critical discourse studies of political discourses in Hong Kong, including the discourses of Hong Kong’s first Chief Executive (Flowerdew 2004), the discursive construction of patriotism in Hong Kong (Flowerdew & Leong 2007), and a critical discourse historiographical study of the Occupy movement of 2014 (Flowerdew 2017). These discourse studies provide guidance to the analytical approaches of this present study.

Informed by Flowerdew’s studies of Hong Kong political discourses, this present study primarily takes a historiographical approach to CDA. This approach ‘aims to contribute to our understanding of the (re)production of inequality and discrimination in contemporary societies’ (Achugar 2018:299). The approach does this not only by demystifying the official history that silences the victims or erases the responsibility of human rights violations by the state, but also provides a critical reading of the past (Achugar 2018). Although many discourse theorists emphasise a historical dimension to interpreting discourse (e.g. Fairclough 2015; Wodak & Fairclough 2010), Flowerdew’s critical discourse historiographical (CDH) approach—developed alongside Wodak’s discourse historical approach (DHA)—contributes to the writing of history (Flowerdew 2017). The difference, according to Flowerdew, is that CDH argues for a role in historiography, while DHA and CDH can both draw attention on ‘the importance of historical dimension of context’ (Flowerdew 2017:470). According to Flowerdew, contested discourses can inform a CDH study based on ‘critical moments that are indicative of a more broadly based developments in discourse and society’ (Flowerdew 2017:456). In this study, the 2019 protests and the 2020 Chinese imposition of National Security Law are examples of such critical moments in Hong Kong’s history that CDH can ‘uncover hidden discourse dimensions of injustice, inequality and other forms of social and political problems’ (Flowerdew 2017:456).

Throughout this study, discursive strategies used by Carrie Lam are analysed from five main dimensions—foregrounding, presupposition, othering, framing, and involvement. Presupposition is assumptions made about the background knowledge of the hearers and assumptions about threats or conditions that must be addressed (Flowerdew 2004). According to Flowerdew, presupposition turns into manipulation when speakers deliberately make assumptions about the degree of shared conception that they know might not be what their hearers truly believe. Othering portrays a group of people as different from oneself. The Other can often be members of a different race and ethnicity, but in the case of Hong Kong, othering strategy has been used to refer to the Chinese mainlanders (Lin et al. 2022). Conversely, during the 2019 protests othering strategy was

used by the Chinese regime to frame the protesters as rioters and pawns whose actions were supposedly despised by a silent majority. Foregrounding is a discursive strategy that brings out substance, depth, extra dimensions, and practical relevance to patterns of language that stand out. Foregrounding can also be used in images that make colour, tone, and focus prominent in some way (Statham 2022). Framing involves the use of particular words and phrases to define problems, people, and actions. The term ‘primary definers’ usually refers to official voices that have the power to generate control and establish definitions of particular situations (Flowerdew & Leong 2007). For instance, the people who value collective interests of Hong Kong and China are framed as patriots by pro-Beijing politicians. Finally, involvement strategy is a strategy that politicians use to extend communality with constituents (Flowerdew 2004). These discursive strategies have been analysed in previous CDA studies of Hong Kong political discourses, such as Flowerdew (2004) and Flowerdew and Leong (2007). By using these discursive strategies, this article builds upon a solid and respected foundation of scholarship and contributes to knowledge of Carrie Lam’s identity, motivation, and beliefs behind the failed Bill.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1 Defender of the core values of Hong Kong

The first speech analysed in this article is Carrie Lam’s victory speech when she was elected as Chief Executive in 2017. This is what Lam said at the time:

Hong Kong, **our home**, is suffering from quite a serious divisiveness and has accumulated a lot of frustration. My priority will be to heal the divide and to ease the frustration—and to unite **our society** to move forward (‘In victory speech, Hong Kong chief executive-elect Carrie Lam vows to heal divisions, reach out to young’ 2017: para. 11).

Contrary to her tough stance manifested later in her tenure, Carrie Lam said at the time she intended to heal the divide in Hong Kong’s society. Hong Kong was already a fractured society by the time of Lam’s ascension to the Chief Executive. This divisiveness in Hong Kong’s society was primarily due to an increasingly vocal pro-Beijing camp and previous administrations that tried to impose a political Chineseness in Hong Kong since the handover of sovereignty. For instance, during the 2016 Fishball Revolution, they agitated for political stability and regularly sang Chinese patriotic songs (Lim 2017). But the Confucian ideal of social harmony is a foreign concept to the people of a former British colony that has its values rooted in individual rights and the rule of law (Yip 2015). By pushing through Beijing’s agenda, the previous governments and their supporters created a new identity in Hong Kong, one that aligns with the national narrative (Flowerdew 2017). Hong Kong’s own identity has therefore been solidified ‘through opposition’ (Flowerdew 2017:464) to Beijing’s hegemony in post-colonial political events.

Since the Umbrella movement in 2014 until the imposition of the National Security Law in 2020, the activists not only pursued their goals through street battles, but also through legal means such as elections to Hong Kong's legislature (Lim 2017). Six localist candidates were elected to the Legislative Council in 2016 (Leung 2019; Lim 2017). This was the political context of Hong Kong when Carrie Lam took the helm as Chief Executive of the HKSAR in 2017. Thus, while Hong Kong's overall political identity has historically been moderately pan-democratic under the British, since around 2014 it has also incorporated a more radical pro-independence faction in opposition to Beijing's interference into Hong Kong's affairs.

Lam's insertion of the first person indexical 'our' when she refers to the home and society is a presupposition strategy. It is only made possible by a genuine Hongkonger who was born and grew up in Hong Kong to 'provide a sense of communal identity' (Flowerdew 2004:1563), as opposed to the colonial governors who did not make Hong Kong their permanent home. In the same speech, Lam 'discursively construct(s) a set of values' (Flowerdew 2004:1563) that she could share with the Hong Kong public. Lam repeats the first person indexical 'our' to identify herself as a fellow Hongkonger who shares the core values of Hong Kong:

Hong Kong is a diverse society, with different views coexisting. Values such as inclusiveness, freedoms of the press and of speech, respect for human rights, and systems which have taken generations to establish, such as the independent judiciary, rule of law and clean government, are matters that we Hong Kong people find precious and are proud of. As your chief executive, I shall do my utmost to uphold "one country, two systems" and to **guard our core values** ('In victory speech, Hong Kong chief executive-elect Carrie Lam vows to heal divisions, reach out to young' 2017: para. 19).

In the above extract, Carrie Lam foregrounds the core values of Hong Kong. Using framing strategy, Lam frames Hong Kong's identity as one that has been established in generations prior to the handover of sovereignty to China, and the values of Hong Kong as separate from that of the Chinese mainland. She acknowledges that there are different views coexisting in Hong Kong at the time. These diverse views have been exacerbated in recent years because of Beijing's interference and people who support the national agenda, as noted above. The phrase 'guard our core values' is particularly relevant in support of the interpretation in the academic literature. In the context of upholding the 'one country, two systems' formula, the phrase suggests presupposition and othering strategies that align with the predominant view in Hong Kong's society at the time: that Beijing and its supporters were seen as the Other who needed to be guarded against for eroding Hong Kong's core values.

CDA relies on the context to make interpretation. We must therefore consider Lam's personal background to understand more deeply about the meaning of her victory speech. Lam was born and grew up in Hong Kong. She worked for the British colonial government for her entire career before the handover ('Carrie Lam: The controversial

leader of Hong Kong' 2020). She had joined the Hong Kong government in 1980 and rose through the ranks of the civil service over a thirty-seven year-period before becoming the Chief Executive in 2017. Lam and her family were awarded full British citizenship through the British Nationality Selection Scheme because of her long-standing service with the colonial government (Hong Kong Watch 2022:6:22). Her values would have been closely aligned with those of British Hong Kong. Lam's desire to 'heal the divide and to ease the frustration' indicates a framing strategy that frames her pro-Beijing predecessor C. Y. Leung as the one who divided the society and betrayed Hong Kong's values. Although it is likely that Beijing's hardline, top-down, authoritarian approach during Lam's term as Chief Executive took her by surprise, she nevertheless chose to defer to Beijing's instruction instead of honouring her promise of guarding Hong Kong's core values against Beijing and standing with the people of Hong Kong. I shall return to Beijing's hegemony over the Chief Executive later, but let us now further analyse what she said about the young people:

In particular, I wish to tap the forces of **our young people**. The young have the most energy. More importantly, they often are at the forefront of society, pulling and pushing us as a whole to make progress. In this campaign, I have felt deeply our young people's strong desires and their passion for Hong Kong. Whether in my district visits, meetings, encounters with protests, or receiving phone calls, emails or Facebook messages, the most forthright are often younger ('In victory speech, Hong Kong chief executive-elect Carrie Lam vows to heal divisions, reach out to young' 2017: para. 23).

Here, an involvement strategy is seen. The phrase 'our young people' indicates Lam's deep respect for Hong Kong young people's desires and passion. During the Umbrella movement of 2014, though not conceding to the demands, Lam was willing to meet with the student leaders for talks on universal suffrage elections (Lim 2018). This meeting was the first sign of a complex interplay between Lam's own idealistic inclination and the pragmatism required in dealing with Beijing. Given the context of Hong Kong's push for democratization and the related protests in the preceding years, the extract shows that Lam was keen to demonstrate her continued willingness to engage with the debate about democratic reforms and to move towards a democratically elected government within constraints imposed by Beijing. Lam then continues to use involvement strategy to highlight her shared ideals with the young people, providing an example of her own social activism during her university days:

I myself started paying attention to social issues and deciding to seek a more just and benevolent society when I was in university. Now, some years later, I am still passionate about serving the people ('In victory speech, Hong Kong chief executive-elect Carrie Lam vows to heal divisions, reach out to young' 2017: para. 24).

Lam herself participated in a student protest in 1978 against the expulsion of four ‘leftist’ students from Precious Blood Golden Jubilee Secondary School (Lau 2017). Her deeply held belief for a more just and benevolent society is therefore a critical revelation about her motivation that could have been the key driver that led to her decision to push ahead with the extradition Bill despite the mass protests. The next section will analyse Lam’s response following the June 12 blocking of the Bill’s second reading.

### 5.2 ‘Mother of Hong Kong’

So far, the analysis has revealed that Lam’s motivation since her university days has been driven by her sense of social justice and benevolence, regardless of one’s political affiliation. Let us now look at what she said after the first in a series of mass protests. As Chief Executive of the HKSAR, Lam’s professional role was to uphold the rule of law. In her mind, Lam believed it was the right thing to do to help the parents of the murder victim find justice, as demonstrated by her statement during the SCMP interview after the June 12 blocking of the Bill’s reading:

I’ve never once thought that I’ve been doing this against my conscience. As I’ve said, we firmly believe we have been doing the right thing from the beginning. It’s not only responsible to the victim’s family. Now I can only say being responsible, but I cannot promise the victims, Mr and Mrs Poon, that the murder suspect can be brought to justice (South China Morning Post 2019:1:10).<sup>2</sup>

We can notice in the extract above that Lam’s use of a plural indexical is an othering strategy to create a division between the government and civil society. Lam portrays the government as lawful and responsible, and the protesters as potentially unlawful and irresponsible. Lam’s statement can be interpreted as an attempt to project a positive image of the government as upholding legal and moral responsibility to help the parents of the victim of a horrendous crime. However, by saying that the government would try to achieve justice for the parents of the murder victim, but cannot guarantee its outcome, the statement points to the challenges of bringing cross-jurisdictional fugitives to justice under the ‘one country, two systems’ framework. In this sense, the statement is a way to deflect responsibility and apportion blame on the protesters for the causing the current crisis. Thus, instead of uniting the society promised in her victory speech two years earlier, Lam did the exact opposite—she divided the society even more than her predecessor. As a result of the Bill, many Hongkongers had accused Lam of selling out Hong Kong to the CCP.

The statement reveals Lam’s underlying belief about justice. That is, to achieve justice, one must right the wrong that has been perpetrated. The murder victim was wronged by

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<sup>2</sup> Carrie Lam spoke in Cantonese, the local dialect of Hong Kong, during the SCMP interview. Her words were translated into English and placed in the closed caption of the SCMP video. The translation is quoted here.

her boyfriend, and Lam was there to help right the wrong. Lam's sense of fairness similarly resulted in her own participation in the 1978 student protest. It is likely that she also felt the four 'leftist' students had been wronged by the colonial government and protested to right the wrong. But Lam's deep sense of justice for the parents of the murder victim at the expense of the 'one country, two systems' framework led her down the wrong path. The Bill would have resulted in Hongkongers facing unfair trials and trumped-up charges in a mainland court system controlled by the Communist regime. This is the Hongkongers' main fear that caused the 2019 protests. Although Lam believed she was doing the right thing because the Bill would have facilitated the rule of law by sending the murder suspect to Taiwan, she failed to assess the potential implication for the society at large. In short, it appears likely that Lam's deep sense of justice and fairness for the parents of the murder victim had clouded her judgment when her government proceeded with the controversial Bill to help Mr and Mrs Poon find justice.

Lam's response using a mother-child metaphor only shows how out of depth the Chief Executive was with the public outcry:

If young people have taken action, and you don't give them what they want, what then? To use a metaphor, I am a mother, I have two sons. If I let him have his way every time my son acts this way, I believe we will have a good relationship in the short term. But if I indulge his wayward behaviour, he might regret it after he grows up. He will then ask me, Mum, why didn't you remind me back then? (South China Morning Post 2019:1:35).

Using discursive strategy of framing, Lam portrays the protesters as having done the wrong thing and herself as a caring mother to the protesters whom she likens to her own children. Lam's use of the metaphor may have been a manifestation of a mother's role in Chinese culture that cares for the children in the family. The metaphor indicates that Lam portrays herself and the Hongkongers as part of the same family, in which she is the 'Mother of Hong Kong'. The metaphor could therefore be interpreted to mean that Lam shares the same values with the family of Hongkongers—in Lam's own words, values such as 'inclusiveness, freedoms of the press and of speech, respect for human rights, and systems which have taken generations to establish, such as the independent judiciary, rule of law and clean government' ('In victory speech, Hong Kong chief executive-elect Carrie Lam vows to heal divisions, reach out to young' 2017: para. 19). It is obvious that Lam did not see the Bill in any conflict with the core values in Hong Kong but saw it as upholding for the parents of the murder victim the rule of law, which is indeed a bedrock principle of Hong Kong (see Flowerdew 1997). Though Lam later admitted that she saw herself as a career bureaucrat who did not understand much about politics (Magramo 2020), this clumsy and patronizing attempt by the Chief Executive to defuse the situation had backfired and worsened public confidence (Purbrick 2019).

### *5.3 Loyal servant of Hong Kong*

If Carrie Lam is passionate about justice and benevolence, her sense of duty to Hong Kong is even stronger. Let us examine Lam's response to the accusation that she was selling out Hong Kong:

To say I have sold out Hong Kong. How could I have? I grew up here with all other Hongkongers. My love for this place has prompted me to make many personal sacrifices. I said this was going to be a relaxed interview. What I meant by relaxing was, you know that I have a husband at home, Mr. Lam, who doesn't care about politics or global affairs. He too also has an opinion about the accusation that I was selling out Hong Kong. This was what he thought: 'How could you have sold out Hong Kong? But the one problem you have I would say is, after becoming the chief executive, you have sold yourself to Hong Kong' (South China Morning Post 2019:2:12).

Using framing as a discursive strategy, Lam's statement portraying herself as a fellow Hongkonger is only made possible because she is a genuine Hongkonger who grew up in Hong Kong. It would not have been possible if the colonial governor had been governing Hong Kong at the time. Further, Lam's association of herself as growing up with all other Hongkongers is an involvement strategy to extend a sense of communality with her constituents at a crucial time when she needed support. Her tears signal an emotional framing strategy to express regret over a Bill that had caused the protests. Still using framing strategy, Lam's denial that she was selling out Hong Kong is an attempt to frame the situation in a specific way—that the charge is false ('How could I have?'), that she is a loyal servant of Hong Kong ('My love for this place has prompted me to make many personal sacrifices'), or that the accusation is a misunderstanding ('after becoming the chief executive, you have sold yourself to Hong Kong'). The context of her own framing as the 'Mother of Hong Kong' who shares the same values with Hongkongers, that she is part of the family of Hongkongers and knows what is best for Hong Kong, adds to the plausibility of this interpretation.

### *5.4 Under the influence of Beijing's control*

The protesters defaced the emblem of the PRC on the night of July 21, 2019. Given the context of Beijing's interference that led to the 2014 Umbrella movement, it was probable that a large section of society believed the Bill had been influenced by Beijing. The defacement is both a framing strategy and othering strategy. The act frames China as the oppressor who interferes in Hong Kong's affairs. It is a non-recognition of the PRC's sovereignty over Hong Kong and symbolic rejection of China's authority over the region. It positions the Hongkongers as the defenders of freedoms and autonomy of their homeland. With regards to othering strategy, the defacement is symbolic of a separate identity that does not recognise the Chinese identity as its own, contrary to the failed efforts by the totalitarian party-state to claim Hong Kong as part of a single Chinese national identity. A day after the defacing, a spokesperson for the Chinese government

released a statement stating that the act had ‘touched the red line’ and was ‘absolutely intolerable’. President Xi Jinping had warned the Hongkongers not to cross the ‘red line’ in his speech during the inauguration of Carrie Lam in 2017 (Xinhuanet 2017). Now, the Chinese government repeated the almost identical language that Xi had used two years before:

这种行径公然挑战中央政府权威，触碰“一国两制”原则底线，性质严重，影响恶劣，是绝对不能容忍的。

[This act openly challenges the authority of the central government and touches the red line of the “one country, two systems” principle. The act is of a serious nature, has a negative impact, and is absolutely intolerable] (Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China 2019: para. 2).

This was the first time since 2017 that the official rhetoric of ‘the red line’ was escalated. The same day, Chief Executive Lam also faced the media and used almost identical language during her press conference:

各位传媒朋友、各位香港市民，昨天在游行后，大家都看到在西区和中、上环一带有一连串暴力行为，特区政府必须在此强烈谴责部分激进示威者恶意包围、冲击中联办大楼，而且污损国徽，公然挑战国家主权，触碰「一国两制」底线，而且伤害民族感情，令全城愤慨，特区政府必定会严肃跟进、依法追究。

[Dear media friends and Hong Kong residents, after yesterday's march, everyone saw a series of violent acts in the Western District and Central and Sheung Wan areas. The SAR government must strongly condemn some radical protesters for maliciously surrounding and assaulting the building of the Liaison Office, as well as defacing the national emblem, openly challenging national sovereignty, touching the red line of “one country, two systems”, and hurting the feelings of the nation, which has angered the entire city. The SAR government will certainly follow up seriously in accordance with the law] (Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region 2019b: para. 2).<sup>3</sup>

Lam’s use of the same phrase ‘touched the red line of one country, two systems’ suggests that the central government had by then given direction to Lam regarding what to say in the press conference. This confirms the view of Purbrick, who states that the

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<sup>3</sup> Carrie Lam spoke in Cantonese during the press conference. Her speech was transcribed into written Chinese in both the traditional and simplified forms and released online. For consistency with the Chinese government statement presented above, the author has chosen to present the simplified written form of Lam’s speech in this paper.

central government ‘organise(s) Hong Kong Government responses’ (Purbrick 2017:481). We can notice that Lam uses an othering strategy to now frame the protesters as the Other despised by a supposedly silent majority. But more significantly, we can notice that Lam’s media briefings had by now become increasingly formal marked by overt ‘power and social distance’ (Fairclough 2015:92) in stark contrast with her victory speech. Her subsequent speeches increasingly reflected Beijing’s narrative instead of the core values of Hong Kong. Thus, July 21 was the point at which Beijing’s meddling into the work of the Chief Executive became increasingly apparent.

The above extract contains a political catchphrase regularly used by the CCP: 伤害民族感情 [hurting the feelings of the Chinese people]. The phrase is normally used by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to express dissatisfaction of words or actions committed by foreign government officials. In the case of Hong Kong, however, it has been used against pro-democracy politicians (Cheung T. 2016). Using presupposition strategy, there is a high degree of certainty in her speech by saying the act had angered the ‘entire city’. But there is evidence that this presupposition is a form of manipulation, as the entire city was in fact angered by Lam’s own incompetence that had led the people to commit this very act. Her approval rating had dropped rapidly from 63.6 when she became Chief Executive on July 1, 2017, to 27.9 by the time the defacement of the PRC emblem occurred (PORI 2022). In fact, at one point during her tenure Lam had scored the lowest rating in Hong Kong’s post-colonial history, at just 18.2 (PORI 2022). The poll clearly indicated that the whole city was indeed deeply dissatisfied with Lam’s performance. The echoing of Beijing’s words indicates that by this time of her tenure, Lam had already lost control of the situation and Beijing had begun to dictate what she needed to do and say. It is not difficult to surmise that Beijing had by now begun to intervene in Hong Kong’s affairs to safeguard its sovereignty and national security after the protesters had crossed the ‘red line’ by throwing black paint at the PRC emblem. This intervention likely indicates that Beijing was similarly deeply dissatisfied with Lam for causing the present impasse that she did not have the ability to lead the Hongkongers out of. The use of formal language made Lam an increasingly reclusive figure in the eyes of the Hong Kong public.

During another protest, a protester was shot in the eye by the police and needed to undergo emergency reconstruction surgery (Kilpatrick 2019). This incident led to protests at Hong Kong’s international airport on August 12, 2019, resulting in its shutdown. Many protesters wore eye patches symbolic of their collective resistance against the heavy-handed police tactics. At a press conference the following day, Chief Executive Lam evaded questions from journalists on whether she had the power and autonomy to withdraw the Bill:

The central government is still confident that I myself as the government of the Hong Kong SAR, together with the police force, that we are still capable of resolving this crisis. The second point I want to make in response to the various demands that we have heard, we have considered all factors and came up with a response that we have rehearsed time and again over the last two months (Guardian News 2019a:0:00).

The language of Lam's response suggests that it is the Chinese government that was in control of Hong Kong by this time of the crisis. Despite the 'one country, two systems' principle, the plural indexical suggests that Lam and her government had been working closely with the central government for a response that had been 'rehearsed time and again over the last two months'. While it is clear that the issue had been escalated to a sovereignty level after the protesters had crossed the 'red line' on July 21, Lam's response that 'we have considered all factors and came up with a response that we have rehearsed time and again over the **last two months**' suggests that the central authorities may have already told Lam to take a hardline approach from the start of the protests in June. Despite Lam's sense of justice for the murder victim's family, her 'Mother of Hong Kong' response after the June 12 incident illustrates a complex interplay between her personal beliefs and political influence from the CCP. The finding that media responses are directed from above aligns with what has been suggested by Purbrick (2019), as noted above. This kind of tightening of control was later manifested in the position of the Advisor of the National Security Council of the HKSAR government being held by a leader of the CCP, effectively making the Chief Executive a puppet of Beijing (Toru 2020).

### *5.5 The CCP as the Other*

On September 3, 2019, the media released a leaked recording of Carrie Lam delivering a speech to the business community. Fighting back tears, this is what she said at the time:

For a chief executive to have caused this huge havoc to Hong Kong is unforgivable. It's just unforgivable. If I had a choice, the first thing is to quit—having made a deep apology—is to step down. So, I make a plea to you for your forgiveness. I'll be very honest with you. It would be naïve of me to paint you a rosy picture that things will be fine, or I have a deadline. I can assure you that Beijing does not have a deadline. They know this will ripple on. They and ourselves have no expectation that we could clear out this thing before the first of October. Another thing I want to assure you, that is my own feeling the pulse and through discussions, CPG has absolutely no plan to send in the PLA. I'm sure a large number of people feel that I do have a solution, that is a political one. But I have to tell you that this is where the crux of the matter lies. Once an issue has been elevated to a national level, to a sort of sovereignty and security level, let alone in the midst of this sort of unprecedented tension between the two big economies in the world, the political room for the chief executive who, unfortunately, has to serve two masters by constitution, that is the central people's government and the people of Hong Kong, that political room for manoeuvring is very, very, very limited (Guardian News 2019b:0:11).

In this extract, Lam uses the speech in an attempt to gain support. She foregrounds the CCP's main concern as the maintenance of stability. By saying that the central

government did not have a deadline and that the CCP did not want a repeat of the 1989 Tiananmen massacre in Hong Kong, Lam reveals the main ideology of the CCP: that stability and order should take priority over democracy. Given the context of Lam's victory speech indicating her openness to young people's desires for a democratic government, it is likely that she did not agree with the CCP's approach to managing the crisis. But the extract indicates that even the Chief Executive was not exempt from Beijing's dominance. Although Lam indicates a balancing act between competing interests, the above speech demonstrates an othering strategy that points to Beijing as the Other, as indicated by Lam's choice of the word 'unfortunately' and the repeated use of the pronoun 'they'. This analysis is consistent with the analysis of Lam's victory speech earlier, that points to Lam's alignment with the public sentiment of othering Beijing.

The phrase 'if I had a choice, the first thing is to quit' is a significant statement in understanding Lam's personal values and an indication of her own Hong Kong identity at heart. It is likely that after becoming Chief Executive, she found dealing with the Communist machinery oppressive; however, she was not given a choice to resign over a problem that she had caused. Resignation of a Chief Executive is not unprecedented. The first Chief Executive of the HKSAR Tung Chee-hwa cited health reason for his resignation in the middle of his second term following his 2003 attempt at introducing a national security legislation that led to mass protests. But the nature of the 2019 protests may have meant that Lam's resignation in the middle of her five-year term, even if approved, would have likely revived a debate about Western-style universal suffrage that had led to the Occupy movement in 2014.

Since Lam was speaking to the Hong Kong business elites, her speech may be interpreted as Lam's own preference to serve the people of Hong Kong instead of Beijing, but that it was an unfortunate position that she had been put into to also serve the other master. Lam's plea to the Hong Kong businesspeople for forgiveness is an admission that she finally saw the introduction of the Bill as a serious mistake on her part. But by the time of the speech—delivered in September—it was likely that Beijing had begun to intervene in the situation in a more direct way. Thus, the speech is likely to be a cryptic attempt at telling the wider community of Hongkongers that she shared their concerns, yet she had no power to do anything about Beijing's hegemony because the issue was now out of her hands.

Further, it may provide some clues to Chief Executive Lam's dawning realisation that her interpretation of the autonomy promised under the 'one country, two systems' model differed from Beijing's interpretation of it. As pointed out in the metaphor of the master—the PRC, to which the Chief Executive is the presumably the servant—Lam testified that she had now found herself with 'very, very, very limited' room for political manoeuvring in her new position as Chief Executive. During the colonial era, the Hong Kong government enjoyed considerable autonomy in policy decision making and Hong Kong was likened to a semi-autonomous state that fought for its own interests (Goodstadt 2005; Hung 2022). That is, colonial Hong Kong was not subordinate to the national government in the United Kingdom. The governor was appointed to serve the people of Hong Kong instead of Beijing or London. Lam uses a rhetorical device of illeism—that is, speaking

in the third person—to make her argument more persuasive: that freedoms and autonomy have been taken away by Beijing. Notwithstanding Beijing’s intervention had been provoked by a Bill introduced by Lam in the first place, the main message that Lam was trying to convey to Hong Kong reflects the broader public concern about Beijing’s increasing dominance and hegemony. In this sense, Lam’s desire and promise made two years earlier to defend Hong Kong’s core values had been thwarted by the Communist apparatus.

### *5.6 Longing for the old days under the British*

Towards the end of her career, Carrie Lam was interviewed about her career and plans for retirement. Let us analyse closely what she said:

I joined the political team as Secretary for Development serving the third term government. By the end of my tenure as the Secretary for Development, I actually had made plans to stay closer to my sons in the United Kingdom. So, I had no aspirations to stay in the government or to even take on a higher position. But the then Chief Executive-elect had urged me and asked me to stay on. And what has driven me to agree is because I have years of experience as a public servant, whereas the then Chief Executive was very much an outsider coming in. Although he had served in the Executive Council, but it isn’t the same. Executive Council is the senior advisors to the Chief Executive. So, in a way I persuaded myself to stay for another five years, to make sure that we could, or as a whole, the government could continue to serve the people of Hong Kong and build Hong Kong (HKIBC English News 2022:3:13).

The phrase ‘I had no aspirations’ is a significant statement of certainty that Lam was ready to step down ten years before her actual retirement in 2022. Her statement adds to the plausibility of the finding that she was not willing to make any decision herself that could have been seen as contradictory to the CCP’s political will, given she was in a position that she only reluctantly took up. It indicates Lam’s lack of aspiration to demonstrate to the CCP leadership that she could provide a political solution to the then ongoing Hong Kong protests. Instead, Lam was ready to let the CCP take control of a Hong Kong problem that she had created in the first place. Lam’s previous statement that she did not understand politics (Magramo 2020) further adds to the probability of this interpretation.

While Lam’s plan of moving to the United Kingdom before taking on the two most senior roles could simply reflect her own personal preference to join her family after retirement, her comment could also be seen as politically significant in terms of her own identity as a Hongkonger. Given the political context of Hong Kong and its relationship with the United Kingdom, Lam’s comment may be interpreted that at heart her political security lies with her former mother country. Lam’s constant reiteration of her identity as a Hongkonger in political speeches, her use of othering strategy to refer to the CCP, her strong British ties having served the British colony since 1980, her British citizenship and

that of her family's, as well as her public statement that she prefers living in the United Kingdom with her sons, could all be representative of Hong Kong's collective experience with its colonial history and longing for the happier times under British rule. Lam's hardline approach to the 2019 Hong Kong protests could be a reflection that Beijing's powerful hegemony and influence have extended to the Chief Executive, as indicated by her increasingly formal tone that echoed the CCP's narrative after the protesters defaced the PRC emblem on July 21, 2019.

## 6. Discussion

After Lam had seemingly lost control of the situation, the CCP leadership would have likely expected her actions and decisions to reflect the CCP's will under the 'one country, two systems' framework. Lam's personal loyalty to Hong Kong, her long-standing service in the colonial government, and her preference of living in the United Kingdom are separate from the public face of the Chief Executive. That the media chose to focus only on Lam's professional role during the 2019 Hong Kong protests may have been due to the higher visibility of that role over her own personal values and beliefs. The angry voice portraying Lam as selling out Hong Kong to the CCP may indicate an oversimplification or distortion of Carrie Lam's personal identity and motivation as a Hongkonger. The voice has led to an incomplete portrayal of the Chief Executive.

Chris Patten's definitive characterisation of Chief Executive Lam as 'quisling' (Hong Kong Watch 2022:7:02) thus is an apparent failure on his part to fully grasp the reality of the position of the Chief Executive of the HKSAR under the 'one country, two systems' framework. That position is not the same position as the Governor of Hong Kong that Patten once held. The governorship had given Patten a far greater degree of autonomy to make decisions in the best interest of Hong Kong without any interference from Beijing than the position of the Chief Executive that Lam held at the time. We must also remember that Lam was rising through the ranks of the colonial civil service under Patten when Patten was the governor of Hong Kong. Patten's categorisation of Lam is therefore a deflection of responsibility on his part for the current crisis. Although Patten himself has said, 'I should have done more' (Phillips T. & Healey 2017), the root causes of public discontent over the years appear to go back to the ambiguity of the 'one country, two systems' doctrine, the vagueness of 'high degree of autonomy' in the Joint Declaration text, and most crucially, the illegitimacy of an unelected and unrepresentative government of the HKSAR. Had Governor Patten been able to secure democratization to a fully representative government prior to the handover of sovereignty to China, the crisis of universal suffrage elections as promised under the Joint Declaration and codified in the Basic Law may not have turned out in the way we have seen in the post-colonial era.

The troubling events of 2019 that led to the imposition of the National Security Law has been a tough learning process for all Hongkongers. However, one must not let the analysis overshadow the murder case at the centre of this debacle. We must acknowledge the real human suffering for the parents, who never received justice or compensation for their murdered daughter. We must not forget that the alleged perpetrator, who although

offering to return to Taiwan to face justice for the crime he confessed, has now got away with murder.

The murder case that triggered the extradition Bill leading to the protests and later the National Security Law indicates three broader implications. First, the case illustrates the difficulties of bringing cross-jurisdictional fugitives to justice. While Carrie Lam's seemingly noble instinct was to help the parents of the murder victim find justice, the reality is that the murder case has been blown out of proportion into a diplomatic crisis between China and the United Kingdom and its allies that offer safe havens to the Hongkongers to escape political repression under the National Security Law. Second, it points to the limitations of the 'one country, two systems' formula. The murder case highlights the difficulty that the Chief Executive had to face in balancing the interests of competing forces. Carrie Lam's relative lack of experience in foreign affairs had likely caused her to be oblivious to the backdrop of a then worsening Sino-United States relationship. Her apparent ignorance of this relationship and politics in general had likely resulted in her government's mishandling of the Bill that later escalated into a national sovereignty and security issue in China. Most importantly, the case shows the unity of Hongkongers standing together to resist threats of CCP's incursion into Hong Kong. If Hong Kong's identity has been established through opposition to the CCP, as Flowerdew (2017) has suggested, it was ultimately the CCP who won the power struggle and later introduced a new curriculum into Hong Kong's schools to propagate a revisionist version of history to the next generation of Hongkongers (see Citizenship and Social Development Web-based Resource Platform 2021).

Perhaps the most severe impact of National Security Law is the assault on Hong Kong's core values. This assault led to the 'death of the OCTS governance model in Hong Kong' (Pei 2020:11). The overarching aim of the law is to 'safeguard the sovereignty, unification and territorial integrity of the People's Republic of China' (Hong Kong e-Legislation 2020: Article 6). But Hong Kong has developed a separate identity and core values such as liberty, democracy, freedom of expression, and human rights that are incompatible with the CCP values of loyalty, harmony, and conformity. The overarching stipulation of unification therefore submerges Hong Kong's identity under the nationalism of a unified Chinese nation. The National Security Law is thus a representation of powerful hegemony that exerts the CCP's dominance and control through the institution of the law that punishes any form of dissent and resistance.

## **7. Conclusion**

This critical analysis of Carrie Lam's political discourses has contributed to the understanding of the Chief Executive, who, though profoundly misguided by a sense of justice and fairness, has attempted to guard the core values of Hong Kong against Beijing's interference, in contrast to how she has been portrayed in the media. Through a historiographical approach to critical discourse analysis, this article has presented a brief historiography of the 2019 protests and the resulting National Security Law. This analysis

does not seek to excuse the actions of Lam and her government in the 2019 protests. Rather, it offers a more nuanced view of the Chief Executive.

The Bill was likely motivated by Lam's long-held view about justice and fairness, as indicated by her victory speech and evidenced by her own participation in student activism, and her determination to help Mr and Mrs Poon who tragically lost their daughter. In this sense, Lam's action was an embodiment of Hong Kong's liberal values, giving greater importance to individual rights over public interests. This finding stands in contrast to how the media has portrayed Lam as one who failed to uphold human rights. However, regardless of Lam's seemingly noble intention to help the parents of the murder victim find justice, she and her government failed to assess the implications of the Bill and totally underestimated the reactions from wide sections of the Hong Kong public. It was Lam's mishandling of what was a Hong Kong local issue that caused the 2019 protests. The protests resulted in an escalation of the problem to a sovereignty level when the protesters threw black paint over the PRC emblem, crossing a 'red line' that President Xi Jinping had two years before told them not to cross. The Bill highlights the need to balance the tensions between maintaining Hong Kong's liberal values such as justice and fairness, the public's fear of the totalitarian regime, and the state's responsibility for territorial integrity under the 'one country, two systems' framework. Having waited for twenty-three years for the HKSAR government that had failed to uphold its constitutional duty to implement Article 23, Beijing saw the 2019 protests as a window of opportunity to intervene by imposing the National Security Law in Hong Kong.

The silencing of Hong Kong's democratic voice after the imposition of the draconian law serves the survival goal of the CCP: to promote a narrowly defined patriotic narrative to 'love the country and love Hong Kong'. That is, to be patriotic one must not criticise the totalitarian-party state in any way. Thus, the 2019 Hong Kong protests were framed as 'unpatriotic, un-Chinese, ungrateful for Chinese support, and dupes of foreign meddling and incitement' (Zhao 2021:154). Discrediting and silencing dissent has been a tried and tested method to promote a nationalist agenda and reinforce the CCP's legitimacy in the Chinese mainland following the 1989 Tiananmen massacre. By similarly framing the 1989 student protesters as counterrevolutionary, the CCP has consolidated its grip on power and fostered a sense of nationalism in the post-90s generation. While the CCP silenced the voice of the Chinese democracy movement by ordering its own soldiers to massacre the students in Tiananmen Square on the night of June 4, 1989, the Hong Kong voice was extinguished by the brutality of the National Security Law imposed on June 30, 2020. By suffocating the Hong Kong voice through punishing dissent and resistance, the CCP has not only destroyed Hong Kong's liberal values which, according to Lam, 'have taken generations to establish', but also made Hong Kong become a compliant society. Chris Patten has pointed out succinctly that the CCP wants 'a Hong Kong without Hong Kongers' (Patten 2022:487) As a result, the government could now pass legislation without any opposition, as has been demonstrated in the speedy enactment of Article 23 on March 23, 2024.

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