



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Postcolonialism and Regimes of Time: Anniversary Journalism of the Hong Kong Handover in British and Chinese Newspapers, 1998–2020

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Abstract

Temporality is important for understanding Hong Kong's postcolonial status since its handover from Britain to China in 1997. This study examines the mediated regimes of postcolonial temporalities in coverage of five anniversaries of the Hong Kong handover (between 1998 and 2020) in Chinese and British newspapers. In 1998, the Chinese and British press shared a significant consensus regarding the “legitimate continuity” of Hong Kong's colonial legacies; however, this consensus was increasingly undermined by ideological contestations surrounding the city's postcolonial ruptures and differences. The multiple temporal claims that emerged in Chinese and British newspapers were systemized within a proposed framework that combined temporal modes (the “formal structures” of temporal relations) and ideological appraisals (the “general politics” where temporal modes are (il)legitimized and (ab)normalized). The temporal complexity concerning Hong Kong exemplifies the former colony's dilemmatic “in-betweenness” and temporal inconclusiveness, which create an open discursive space that invites ideological investments by powerful symbolic stakeholders.

摘要

时间性是理解年香港九七回归以来后殖民地位的关键。本研究比较分析了中英两国媒体在五届香港回归周年报道（1998年至2020年）中构建的“后殖民时间性政权”。在1998年的周年报道中，中英媒体就香港殖民遗产的“合法延续性”达成了一致；然而近些年来，环绕香港后殖民时间断裂性与差异性的意识形态争论取代了对“合法延续性”的共识。本文借助新的概念框架系统归纳了中英媒体周年报道呈现的多重时间主张；该框架整合了 a) 时间模式（时间关系的“形式结构”）与 b) 意识形态评估（时间关系的合法化与规范化）两个维度。中英媒体呈现的复杂时间性体现了香港“中间性”的后殖民状况与“未完成”的时间困局。这一独特的后殖民状态创造了一种开放的话语空间，可供有权势的符号持有者进行符合自身利益的意识形态诠释。

Keywords: postcolonialism; the regime of truth; temporalities; Hong Kong; anniversary journalism; one country; two systems

关键词: 后殖民主义; 真理政权; 时间性; 香港; 周年报道; 一国两制

On 1 July 2020, the day following the proclamation of the controversial Hong Kong National Security Law (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo Xianggang tebie xingzhengqu wei hu guojia anquan fa* 中华人民共和国香港特别行政区维护国家安全法, HKNSL hereafter),¹ *The Atlantic* published a provocative article entitled “Hong Kong is a colony once more.”² The article lamented that the HKNSL was “a return to history for the territory,” with “overlords in a distant capital ... making

1 The HKNSL is a controversial piece of legislation that enables Beijing to set up a security office in Hong Kong.

2 McLaughlin 2020.

decisions on Hong Kong's behalf."³ This perception was in direct contrast to a remark made by Zhang Yong 张勇, the deputy director of the Basic Law Committee, that the HKNSL "responds to the necessary requirement of *decolonizing* the existing laws in Hong Kong."⁴ Despite their opposite views of the HKNSL, both held the same presumptions regarding the temporality and post-colonial situation of Hong Kong; namely, that colonial ideologies and structures should not continue to exist after the formal end of colonialism. These examples illustrate the significance of temporalities in the normative ordering of the former British colony and how such temporalities are malleable in discourses motivated by different sociopolitical interests. Such convergence among discourses, temporalities and political power raises critical questions regarding ideological uses by symbolic stakeholders of the prefix "post" in "postcolonial Hong Kong." In this article, specifically, we investigate how the different constructions of the "post" in "postcolonialism" signify different social imaginings of Hong Kong's past and present, what ideological demands are implied in these constructions, and how multiple constructions of time reflect and shape the dynamic struggles for discursive dominancy over the former colony's future.

To answer these questions, we provide a diachronic and comparative analysis of the construction of Hong Kong's postcolonial temporalities in the elite Chinese and British press across five anniversaries of the Hong Kong handover. This analysis is contextualized in discussions concerning the mediated regimes of postcolonial temporalities and the dilemmatic temporal "in-betweenness" of postcolonial Hong Kong. After presenting the results of this analysis, we offer a framework for systematically interpreting the heterogeneous temporal claims about Hong Kong that emerged in the data.

Mediated Regimes of Postcolonial Temporalities

The term "temporality" refers to the unique way "now" moments are connected to pasts and futures through an uneven passage of time.⁵ As a social construct rather than a natural given, perceptions of temporality are shaped by, and actively shape, political, social and cultural practices, possessing "the power to control movements, to decide about beginnings and endings, [and] to set the pace."⁶ Temporality is an essential construct in (post)colonial processes, as it can function "as a principle of order that increasingly subordinates places."⁷ The expansion of colonial power demands a singular, linear and universalizing Western time contrasted against "othered," stagnant and backward subaltern times.⁸ Anti-colonial struggles, conversely, entail the ratification of "alternative" temporalities that radicalize indigenous history and futurity.⁹ Thus, temporality shapes (post)colonial governmentality by creating imaginative relationships between places, movements and bodies.

The "relationship of difference and sameness, rupture and continuity" between the present and colonial times is a controversial issue in postcolonial studies.¹⁰ The prefix "post," which connotes temporal posteriority to the colonial era, has been subject to sustained criticism. On one hand, "post" entails a singular spatio-temporality that juxtaposes extremely heterogeneous temporal experiences.¹¹ On the other hand, it connotes a misleading sense of historical rupture that

3 Ibid.

4 "Zhang Yong: Xianggang yuan you falü qu zhimin hua shi biran yaoqiu" (Zhang Yong: the "decolonization" of Hong Kong's law is an inevitable necessity). *Sing Tao*, 5 July 2021, <https://www.singtao.ca/5043580/2021-07-05/news-%E5%BC%B5%E5%8B%87%EF%BC%9A%E9%A6%99%E6%B8%AF%E5%8E%9F%E6%9C%89%E6%B3%95%E5%BE%8B%E3%80%8C%E5%8E%BB%E6%AE%96%E6%B0%91%E5%8C%96%E3%80%8D%E6%98%AF%E5%BF%85%E7%84%B6%E8%A6%81%E6%B1%82/?variant=zh-hk>. Emphasis added.

5 West-Pavlov 2012.

6 Jordheim 2014, 510.

7 Mignolo 2002, 67.

8 Chakrabarty 2009.

9 Bartels et al. 2019.

10 Shohat 2006, 239.

11 Shohat 2006.

obfuscates the continuation of colonial structures.¹² A pluralistic conception of temporality is more appropriate for capturing the complexity of postcolonial experiences. Thus, Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge distinguish between two “post” temporalities: the hyphenated “post-colonial,” which emphasizes the opposite side to colonialism, and the non-hyphenated “postcolonial,” which represents the “underside” of ongoing colonization.¹³ Postcolonial temporalities are not only divergent across societies but are also “radically multiple” in the same society, meaning “a given individual or community may move through/enact/experience several times simultaneously.”¹⁴ As such, the postcolonial situation entails “entangled multiplanar temporalities” organized in a “systemic overlap” that is constantly contested and reworked.¹⁵

Media are paramount to producing and circulating discourses regarding postcolonial temporalities as a powerful means of disseminating political and sociocultural power. While classic accounts of media and temporality often focus on the macro-sociological impact of new communication technologies,¹⁶ more recent works have examined how media construct ideas about temporalities in practice.¹⁷ Critical attention has been paid to how media produce and negotiate “multilayered, intersecting and potentially competing” temporalities contingent upon political ideologies, institutional structures, news routines and commercial considerations.¹⁸ From this perspective, mediated temporal discourses are deeply political practices that establish what Thomas Poell terms the “temporal regimes,” which “shape societal sense-making processes during particular periods.”¹⁹

Among various media outlets, journalism is a fundamental institution that stores, reconstructs and disseminates narratives about time.²⁰ As principal eyewitnesses to historical events, journalists exercise a particular cultural authority in interpreting and recollecting the past.²¹ Anniversary journalism is a type of “calendar journalism” and refers to the news-making practice of re-narrating and summarizing historical events on their anniversaries.²² Instead of “neutrally” recounting historical facts, anniversary journalism relies on the cultural-cognitive device of “framing”²³ that selects, deselects and makes certain aspects of past events salient in news coverage.²⁴ By structuring what and how people know about the past, anniversary journalism establishes analogies across time and offers explanations and remedies for present circumstances.²⁵ However, existing studies on mediated temporal discourses have paid little attention to postcolonial temporalities, despite “the postcolonial” being a thoroughly temporal concept. The present study views anniversary journalism as historical, ideological and structured rearticulations of the temporal link between the colonial past and postcolonial present. Accordingly, we focus on temporal discourses presented in anniversary journalism concerning the postcolonial transition of Hong Kong, a former British colony marked by its temporal dilemma.

12 West-Pavlov 2012, 160.

13 Mishra and Hodge 1991, 405.

14 Helgesson 2014, 556.

15 West-Pavlov 2012, 170, 51.

16 Castells 2009; Virilio 2005.

17 Poell 2020; Kehoe 2020.

18 Keightley 2013, 60.

19 Poell 2020, 610.

20 Zelizer 2008.

21 Ibid.

22 Tuchman 1978.

23 Gitlin 1980; Entman 1993. Broadly speaking, framing refers to the recurrent patterns of selection, organization and accentuation in media representation that define the meaning and “essence” of events.

24 Kitch 2006.

25 Lang and Lang 1989.

Hong Kong's Temporal Dilemma

While Hong Kong is a former British colony of occupation, its postcolonial situation differs from most former colonies of this type where decolonization generally entailed active and often violent popular revolutions that resulted in the creation of independent nation-states. In contrast, Hong Kong's decolonization was determined by the Sino-British talks of the 1980s.²⁶ Unlike most post-independent ex-colonies that ratified indigenous rights through democracy, in Hong Kong the outcome of decolonization was a "handing over" of sovereignty from Britain to China under the "one country, two systems" (*yiguo liangzhi* 一国两制, OCTS hereafter). As an alternative to China's previous, hard-line position of "sovereignty resumption," the OCTS was designed to ensure a "smooth transition" from British rule, where China "indiscriminately accepted the system handed down from the British administration."²⁷ Paradoxically, such continuity in Hong Kong's colonial legacies sat uneasily with China's discursive celebrations of the Hong Kong handover as a symbol of "wiping away humiliation" (*xuechi* 雪耻),²⁸ marking the event as a decisive and emotive termination of Western colonial domination.²⁹ These paradoxes indicate the postcolony's dilemmatic temporal "in-betweenness"; it has a "triple non-status" as neither a colony, a Chinese province nor an independent state, which renders the city's temporal "becoming" ambivalent and inconclusive.

The present article highlights Hong Kong's postcolonial temporalities as political discourses coeval with prioritized ideologies by powerful actors. While the use of temporal discourses by political camps inside Hong Kong has been examined,³⁰ little attention has been paid to Hong Kong's postcolonial temporalities as invoked in the news media of the city's previous and current sovereign holders. Under the OCTS, China has arguably "the greatest impact on political development" in Hong Kong through law interpretation, informal organizations, chief-executive appointments and economic leverage.³¹ Like China, the UK, as Hong Kong's former sovereign owner, continues to be relevant, as the city's anti-establishment movements actively seek international support for political leverage. The foregrounding of British and Chinese media in this study speaks to the imbalanced Beijing–London–Hong Kong relations as, in the words of Deng Xiaoping 邓小平, "not three legs, only two legs."³² While bringing out Hong Kong people's voices is crucial for unsettling colonial structures that obfuscate indigenous agency, this study aims to critically address the most powerful symbolic institutions in producing temporal narratives about Hong Kong. Accordingly, we ask: how does anniversary journalism in elite Chinese and British newspapers create regimes of time that discursively interpret and rework Hong Kong's postcolonial temporal dilemma?

Methods

This study analyses two British newspapers, *The Times* (TT hereafter) and *The Guardian* (TG hereafter) and two Chinese newspapers, *China Daily* (*Zhongguo ribao* 中国日报, CD hereafter) and *People's Daily* (*Renmin ribao* 人民日报, PD hereafter). The TT and TG were selected because they are widely considered influential "broadsheets" with elite readerships.³³ Owing to their different ideological stances – the centre-right (TT) and centre-left (TG) – the two newspapers represent a broad spectrum of political opinions.³⁴ Meanwhile, CD is China's leading English daily with a

26 Scott 2017.

27 Law 2017, 236.

28 Wang 2014, 130.

29 Pan et al. 1999.

30 Law 2017.

31 Ortmann 2015, 34.

32 Scott 2017.

33 Carvalho and Burgess 2005.

34 Ibid.

large international circulation covering over 150 countries,³⁵ and the PD is the most important mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).³⁶ It can be argued that these British and Chinese newspapers are “functionally equivalent” in representing the elite consensus in their respective national media systems.

Historical events often receive more coverage at their “major” anniversaries (for example, the first, tenth and 20th) because of the symbolic value of “seminal” calendar numbers.³⁷ Accordingly, this study focuses on three major anniversaries of the Hong Kong handover: the first (1998), the tenth (2007) and the 20th (2017). Besides being major years, these anniversaries are chosen because they coincide with three consecutive presidencies – those of Jiang Zemin 江泽民, Hu Jintao 胡锦涛 and Xi Jinping 习近平. Additionally, we analyse news reports for the 22nd (2019) and 23rd (2020) anniversaries which, despite being “off” years, attracted widespread media attention because they coincided with seminal events in Hong Kong. On the eve of the 22nd anniversary, a large group of protesters from the Anti-Extradition Law Amendment Bill Movement (*fan xiuli yundong* 反修例运动, Anti-ELAB hereafter) stormed and occupied Hong Kong’s Legislative Council (*Xianggang tebie xingzhengqu lifahui* 香港特别行政区立法会, LegCo hereafter).³⁸ The 23rd anniversary occurred the day after the passing of the controversial HKNSL. This study retrieved all news items (stories with headlines) that contained the word “Hong Kong” published between 24 June and 8 July of the five selected years. The search results were manually screened to identify items that were a) anniversary opinion pieces or b) coverage of events explicitly associated with the anniversary.

The authors first code each news item by article type, author type and event covered to offer backgrounds of the data. Then, we identify and examine all articulations of postcolonial temporalities using critical discourse analysis (CDA), an in-depth textual analysis that unearths the ideology and power relations reproduced in language.³⁹ CDA views discourse as integral to social change, with the latter’s non-linguistic “moments” being embedded in, conditioned by and actively shaping webs of meanings constituted in language.⁴⁰ The relationship between language and social change is mediated by intertextuality – the temporary articulation of discourses by reference, incorporation and hybridization.⁴¹ CDA is a type of “symptomatology” that uncovers symptoms of social change in the “articulatory” shift in language.⁴² This study is interested in the intertextual hybridization of “historical discourses” about the “colonial” Hong Kong with “news discourses” concerning the “postcolonial” now-moment in anniversary reports, which symptomized shifting ideological orientations of dominant symbolic actors. The analysis is guided by three questions: a) what relationships between “now” and colonial times were constructed in terms of sameness and difference, continuities and ruptures; b) how were these relationships evaluated; and c) what ideological orientations about Hong Kong’s futures did these accounts imply?

Results

While media attention to anniversary events often fades with time, this study’s news search depicted more nuanced trends, as shown in Table 1.⁴³ In the three “major” years, the number of anniversary

35 Hartig 2017.

36 Duan and Takahashi 2017.

37 Keith 2012.

38 The 2019 Anti-ELAB Movement has been Hong Kong’s largest political movement since 1997. Triggered by the Hong Kong government’s legislative proposal that would enable extradition to mainland China, this movement escalated into months of violent clashes between protesters and police.

39 Weiss and Wodak 2007.

40 Fairclough 1992.

41 Ibid.

42 Weiss and Wodak 2007.

43 Keith 2012.

Table 1: Numbers of Anniversary Reports in Chinese and British Newspapers

| | 1998 | 2007 | 2017 | 2019 | 2020 |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Chinese press | 25 | 50 | 71 | 13 | 8 |
| CD | 2 | 14 | 22 | 7 | 1 |
| PD | 23 | 36 | 49 | 6 | 7 |
| British press | 11 | 13 | 14 | 28 | 22 |
| TT | 7 | 9 | 6 | 7 | 10 |
| TG | 4 | 4 | 8 | 21 | 12 |

reports increased in Chinese newspapers while remaining stable in the British press.⁴⁴ In the two “off” years, Chinese coverage declined while numbers of British reports increased. These trends speak to divergent coverage patterns in the Chinese and British press, as shown in Table 2. While news reports written by professional journalists account for most items in both countries’ press, British authors are more “concentrated” than Chinese authors, with five journalists accounting for one-third of British but only one-eighth of Chinese stories. Compared with the British press, journalists account for a smaller percentage of authors in the Chinese press, with 17 items written by politicians/army officers and 11 by scholars. Prominent contributors to PD, for example, include Hong Kong’s chief executive Donald Tsang 曾蔭權, chief secretary Henry Tang 唐英年, LegCo president Rita Fan 范徐麗泰 and the renowned businessman Henry Fok 霍英東. Likewise, op-eds, alongside features and editorials, accounted for a higher percentage of contributions in the Chinese press, with British newspapers producing more news reports. Finally, the Chinese press focused more on “pre-planned” ritualistic events (celebrations and presidential activities) and generic (not event-focused) stories than did the British newspapers, which drew more attention to disruptive occurrences (protests and crackdowns) on the anniversary.

Three arguments can be drawn from these observations. First, since drafting feature stories, planning ritualistic coverage and contacting non-staff writers are more time-consuming than conventional journalistic new reporting, we argue that Chinese anniversary journalism was not only pre-planned “calendar journalism” that stretched over extended times but also a carefully choreographed political event managed by the CCP. In contrast, British anniversary journalism was more event-focused and relatively less “rehearsed.” This difference explains why British coverage increased in the two “off” years coinciding with “unscheduled” sensational events (the LegCo storming and the HKNSL), while Chinese reports decreased. Second, the salience of prominent political, academic and business authors in the Chinese press exemplifies the party-state’s media organ as a “fourth governmental branch” for consolidating and communicating elite cohesion, serving “hybrid functions” of reporting, co-optation, power display and legitimation for the CCP.⁴⁵ In contrast, the concentrative pattern of British authors reveals the discursive power of a small circle of elite journalists in communicating critical affairs to the public.⁴⁶ Finally, the stark differences in foregrounded events reveal how news media shape normative societal imaginings by defining what counts as “news.”⁴⁷ While the Chinese press rendered the anniversary a national celebration of Hong

44 The amount of anniversary coverage is shaped by commemorative activities, the anniversary’s symbolic “timing” and relations to other events (ibid.). For instance, Chinese reports of the 20th anniversary increased because the event coincided with President Xi’s first presidential tour to Hong Kong, the visit of China’s first aircraft carrier fleet and the city’s first administrative inauguration after the Umbrella Movement. The British anniversary coverage did not increase, because these events were less newsworthy for British readers.

45 Brady 2009.

46 Van Ginneken 1998.

47 Ibid.

Table 2: Numbers of Anniversary Reports by Author Types, Article Types and Covered Events

| Author types | CD and PD | TT and TG | Article types | CD and PD | TT and TG | Covered events | CD and PD | TT and TG |
|--------------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|--|-------------|-------------|
| Journalists | 114 68.3% | 75 85.2% | News reports | 96 57.5% | 69 78.4% | Celebrations | 41 24.6% | 4 4.5% |
| Politicians/PLA officers | 17 10.2% | 0 | Features | 25 15.0% | 8 9.1% | Protests | 5 3.0% | 33 37.5% |
| Scholars | 11 6.6% | 1 1.1% | Editorials | 14 8.4% | 5 5.7% | Presidential activities and statements | 23 13.8% | 8 9.1% |
| Businesspeople | 5 3.0% | 2 2.3% | Op-ed | 32 19.2% | 6 6.8% | Other political statements | 7 4.2% | 8 9.1% |
| News agency | 4 2.4% | 0 | | | | Beijing “crackdowns” | 0 | 11 12.5% |
| Activists | 0 | 1 1.1% | | | | Other events | 6 3.6% | 8 9.1% |
| Anonymous | 16 9.6% | 9 10.2% | | | | Not event-focused | 92 55.1% | 22 25% |

Kong's reunification, the same event signalled an "unhappy anniversary" for the British press, disrupted by conflicts and counter-mobilizations. The following sections will further show how Chinese and British media exploited the anniversary's "multiple interpretive potentials" to construct distinct postcolonial temporalities.

Postcolonial Continuities: Horse Racing and Dancing Will Go On (1998)

Across the four newspapers, temporal continuity with the colonial era was consistently emphasized on the first anniversary, as shown in the following headlines: "Hong Kong charm and style remain the same" (PD, 1 July 1998), "Transfer makes no difference in [Hong Kong]" (CD, 29 June 1998), "Crown's spirit comes with the territory" (TT, 7 July 1998), and "Only the names have changed" (TT, 7 July 1998).

While Hong Kong's first year after the handover coincided with the 1997 Asian financial crisis, both Chinese and British newspapers rejected linking Hong Kong's economic recession to the sovereignty transfer. TG, for example, insisted that "the origins of [the recession] are external. The fabric of Hong Kong society, its economic system, and its way of life remain much as before" (4 July 1998). CD, likewise, argued that "there is no connection between the economic downturn and the Handover" (29 June 1998); "The transfer of sovereignty has made no practical difference" except that "Chinese flags flutter in those official places where British flags fluttered before" (29 June 1998). PD, moreover, cited Deng Xiaoping's famous quote, "horse racing and dancing will go on" (*ma zhao pao, wu zhao tiao* 马照跑, 舞照跳), to describe the continuation of Hong Kong's "old" lifestyles after 1997:

Hong Kong continues to be a highly free, open, and international liberal capitalist economy. The city's original legal system, independent judiciary, and power of final adjudication are maintained. Hong Kong citizens have retained their original lifestyles, freedom of speech, and freedom to enter or leave. *Horse racing, dancing, and stock speculating will go on.* ("Prosperity, stability, and a solid foundation." PD, 1 July 1998. Emphasis added.)

In this account, (post)colonial continuity signified both a normative ideal and an achievement for China. It was connected to Beijing's "solemn promise" to "keep [Hong Kong's] original capitalist system and lifestyles unchanged for 50 years" and to "never intervene in Hong Kong's politics, economy, legislation, and society" (PD, 1 July 1998). Accordingly, Hong Kong's post-1997 constitutional principle, the OCTS, was represented as a "guidance to materialize a *smooth transition* and maintain prosperity" (PD, 24 June 1998. Emphasis added).

Similarly, the elite British press constructed postcolonial continuity as both a reality and a normative expectation for post-1997 Hong Kong. TT (7 July 1998) featured a story about Ian Wingfield, the former "Crown solicitor" of Hong Kong, whose post was renamed "law officer" after 1997. Despite the sovereignty transfer, the article insisted that "only the names have changed" in Hong Kong's legal systems, which continued to function as "in England and Wales." Elsewhere, TT stated that "fears for Hong Kong's legal system were misplaced" as "old traditions have been maintained" and the economic system "has been business as usual" (7 July 1998). TG (1 July 1998) regarded the handover as merely "formal deference" that left "most areas of life in the former British territory ... unaffected." Thus, the handover of Hong Kong was reconstructed in both the Chinese and British press as a "mundane" event in the processual flows of time, enabling the city's "smooth transition" from colonialism.

One Progress, Two Temporal Interpretations (2007)

While anniversary journalism in 1998 focused on stability and the continuity of the "old" colonial systems, in the tenth anniversary reports both the Chinese and British press highlighted the city's

unprecedented achievements, as shown in headlines such as: “A glorious decade following Hong Kong’s return” (PD, 1 July 2007); “Triumph of ‘one country, two systems’” (CD, 2 July 2007); “As memories of colonial rule fade, a prosperous island celebrates success” (TG, 30 June 2007); and “Ten years of stellar progress” (TT, 2 July 2007). The emphasis shifted from preserving the “good old days” to celebrating the “stellar progress.”

A recurrent theme was the linear construction of post-1997 Hong Kong’s economic success. The Chinese press repeatedly cited official data to compare “now and then” and highlight positive changes: “[Since 1997, the number of] companies headquartered in Hong Kong has increased by 50%” (PD, 27 June 2007); “mainland tourists skyrocketed by 475%” (PD, 29 June 2007); and “Hong Kong’s economy is now in its best position in 20 years” (CD, 28 June 2007). Progressive change was also marked in the British press, with statements such as “trade with the mainland has risen fourfold since 1997” (TG, 30 June 2007); “stock market capitalization ... has quadrupled since the handover” (TT, 2 July 2007); and “foreign reserves ... up 44 per cent” since 1997 (TT, 2 July 2007). According to a summation in TT (2 July 2007), “there is an air of solid success” in the first post-1997 decade; “[Hong Kong] seems a happier place now that its direction is clear.”

Despite these similarities, two national differences can be identified. First, Chinese narratives of postcolonial success typically set 1997 as the chronological beginning, disregarding pre-1997 times. Hong Kong’s economic upsurge was attributed to Beijing’s “all-out support” and the “unprecedented success” of the OCTS (CD, 28 June 2007). These narratives rendered 1997 a discrete beginning in Hong Kong’s history while effacing the colonial legacies that shaped the city’s post-1997 economy. In contrast, TT (2 July 2007) associated Hong Kong’s success with its liberal, international “raison d’être” under British common law, which was “what it [had been] 20 years ago.” Another article invoked the city’s colonial landmarks and symbols, asserting “some things in Hong Kong never changed” (TT, 2 July 2007). According to TG (30 June 2007), Britain’s contributions were actively forgotten, and the city’s tycoons who “made money [under] British rule” were forced to “ditch their British connections” and “behave like Judas.” These accounts constructed British colonialism as a silent yet deliberately effaced begetter of Hong Kong’s postcolonial successes.

Second, there was a stark difference regarding the construction of Hong Kong’s postcolonial political change. In the Chinese press, Hong Kong people were alleged to “enjoy more democratic rights than they did under British control” (CD, 28 June 2007), which was a “giant democratic advancement,” as there had been a change from “British people ruling Hong Kong” to “Hong Kong people ruling Hong Kong” (PD, 1 July 2007). Post-1997 elections for the LegCo and chief executive were contrasted against “authoritarian rule by the British Governor” and the LegCo’s former “control by British authorities” (PD, 1 July 2007), highlighting a discontinuous shift from “colonial” to “democratic” Hong Kong. In contrast, the British press presented democracy as postcolonial Hong Kong’s “unfinished” task. Most reports contrasted anniversary celebrations with “marchers demanding free vote” (TT, 2 July 2007), who represented Hong Kong’s “vast majority” and expected “democracy immediately” (TG, 2 July 2007). The post-1997 Hong Kong was described as an “unpopular plutocrac[y]” marked by “inequality and frustration,” with “no progress towards universal suffrage” (TG, 30 June 2007). This “unfulfilled” narrative constructed British colonialism not as Hong Kong’s undemocratic “dark past,” but rather as the induction stage for a “continuing struggle ... for representative democracy, a struggle encouraged by [the last British governor] Chris Patten” (TT, 4 July 2007). Democracy was represented as Britain’s “parting gift” to the ex-colony, a “Pandora’s box” that China had inherited reluctantly and “has struggled to slam ... shut” (TG, 30 June 2007).

National Frame of Time and Postcolonial Discontinuities (2017)

While Chinese coverage of the first and tenth anniversaries focused more on Hong Kong’s local transformation, the 20th anniversary was dominated by a national frame of time, as shown in

headlines such as “[Hong Kong] becoming part of [the] Chinese dream” (CD, 2 July 2017), “Tying hearts to the motherland, building dreams on the Xiangjiang riverside” (PD, 29 June 2017) and “People with the same root and same heart welcome grand ceremony” (PD, 1 July 2017). According to PD:

For colonial rulers, Hong Kong, during more than 100 years of colonialism, was “a borrowed place, a borrowed time.” In the past 20 years, however, the Hong Kong that returned to the motherland has finally begun to express “our place, our time” (“Collaboratively writing Hong Kong’s memorable history on the Xiangjiang riverside.” PD, 29 June 2017).

As this excerpt shows, the Hong Kong handover was not only the return of sovereignty to China but also a temporal return to the national time. Hong Kong’s temporality was recalibrated with Xi Jinping’s “Chinese dream” (*Zhongguo meng* 中国梦), which demarcated a “century of humiliation” (from the First Opium War of 1839–1842 to 1945) from the country’s linear and progressive “century of rejuvenation” under the CCP.⁴⁸ In Chinese anniversary coverage, the handover consistently signified “a glorious memory in Chinese people’s hearts” that “wash[ed] away one hundred years of humiliation” (PD, 1 July 2017) and marked Hong Kong’s “incorporation into the magnificent journey of the great national rejuvenation of China” (PD, 3 July 2019). Thus, the ceding and return of Hong Kong signified the historical contrast between the weakness of the “old China” and the power of the “new China” (CD, 3 July 2017).

Such discrete narratives of national rejuvenation, however, sit paradoxically with PD’s emphasis on the “return of people’s hearts” (*renxin huigui* 人心回归) as postcolonial Hong Kong’s ongoing task. Whereas 1997 marked the return of Hong Kong’s sovereignty, “the ‘return of people’s hearts’ cannot be achieved overnight, but requires unremitting long-term efforts” (PD, 26 June 2017). Here, the emphasis shifts from temporal ruptures to the continuing “colonial mentality” after 1997. As PD stated, “it is inevitable that the Hong Kong people felt a little timid and uncomfortable after ‘coming home’,” as “Hong Kong was under British rule for more than 150 years.” This problem necessitated public education, a patriotic campaign and even Mandarin promotions (to facilitate the “return of language”; PD, 26 June 2017) to afford “decolonization of the mind.”

For the British press, however, the 20th anniversary was “a time for demonstration instead of celebration” (TG, 28 June 2017). Compared with previous emphases on economic and political continuities, British coverage of the 20th anniversary highlighted radical political ruptures, as shown in headlines such as “China ‘humiliating’ the UK by scrapping Hong Kong handover deal” (TG, 1 July 2017), “20 years on, Beijing rips up deal over Hong Kong” (TT, 1 July 2017) and “We can’t stand by as Hong Kong is crushed” (TT, 28 June 2017). The temporal discontinuities were constructed via historical comparisons. While Hong Kong under British rule “had already emerged as a place with rule of law, low tolerance of corruption, independent academic institutions and a strong media, with freedom of expression and protest[,] [t]hese institutions and practices are now under mounting threat” (TG, 30 June 2017). Britain’s liberal legacies were being “stripped away” as Beijing “trample[d] on pre-handover commitments that Hong Kong’s way of life would remain ‘unchanged’” (TG, 28 June 2017). Twenty years after 1997, Britain’s “most successful modern colony” (TT, 1 July 2017) was “crushed” and has now become “in effect a Chinese colony” (TT, 28 June 2017).

Temporal Ambiguity and Colonial Metaphors (2019 and 2020)

The 22nd and 23rd anniversaries coincided with controversial events: the storming of the LegCo by Anti-ELAB protesters on 1 July 2019 and the passing of the HKNSL on 30 June 2020. British coverage of the 2019 LegCo storming mentioned the unfurling by protesters of a British colonial flag and

48 Wang 2014.

the waving of the Union flag in the LegCo chamber, a symbolic image that marked “the most serious challenge to the legitimacy of Chinese rule in 22 years” (TT, 2 July 2019). While the invocation of the colonial flag connoted Hong Kong’s ties to colonial times, TT (3 July 2019) insisted that the flag “was evidence not of nostalgia for British rule but a rejection of contemporary foreign interference.” Here, Beijing was constructed as a “foreign” intruder that had “chipped away at the city’s autonomy for 22 years” (TG, 5 July 2019) and “stamp[ed] down the city’s freedoms and culture” (TG, 2 July 2019).

Whereas the Anti-ELAB Movement marked Hong Kong’s “last resistance” to Chinese influences, the HKNSL was consistently presented as “the end of an age of Hong Kong” (TT, 1 July 2020) and as marking the “full takeover by China” (TG, 30 June 2020). The press claimed that Hong Kong’s autonomy was “devastated” by the HKNSL (TG, 30 June 2020), and that “many protesters accept that ‘one country, two systems’ is over” (TG, 27 June 2020). This discourse of historical ruptures was interwoven with another colonial metaphor: the construction of Hong Kong as “a Chinese colony.” This was epitomized in headlines such as “[China’s] colonial misrule” (TG, 2 July 2019) and “The [Chinese] empire is against them but don’t write off protesters” (TT, 1 July 2020). Further:

It is now clear that the handover was not so much the end of empire, as the Prince of Wales complained, but the beginning of a far more pernicious imperialism that the West has been slow to recognize (“Two systems.” TT, 2 July 2020).

This colonial metaphor entails ambiguous temporality. While it connects British and Chinese rule as both “imperial colonialism,” “continuity” was contextualized to differentiate Britain’s “benign” colonialism from China’s “far more pernicious imperialism,” with each representing “two systems of democracy and totalitarianism [that] are incompatible” (TT, 2 July 2020). The epochs of “good” and “bad” colonialism were demarcated by the introduction of the HKNSL, which signalled “the “real” return of Hong Kong to China” (TG, 27 June 2020). Thus, Britain, the partial drafter of Hong Kong’s post-1997 constitution, had “moral and legal obligations” to “unite [with Western nations] to combat Chinese expansionism” that had expunged Britain’s liberal legacies in its ex-colony (TT, 2 July 2020).

Similarly, Chinese coverage of the 22nd and 23rd anniversaries was also marked by ambiguous temporalities. On the one hand, the Chinese press returned to the discontinuous framing of 1997 as Hong Kong’s emancipation from colonial oppression with headlines such as “Great achievements 20 years after reunification” (PD, 30 June 2019) and “The whole city celebrates achievements on the Xiangjiang riverside” (PD, 1 July 2019). Historically, Hong Kong citizens’ “wealth of civil and political rights” that “has progressed in leaps and bounds” was contrasted against their status as “second-class citizens during the colonial period” (CD, 8 July 2019).

However, this postcolonial emancipation narrative was unsettled by the alleged “colonial mentality” of critics of Hong Kong affairs. Paraphrasing the British intellectual Martin Jacques, CD (4 July 2020) contended that “China may have broken Hong Kong free from colonial rule back in 1997, but Jacques said the West has yet to break free from a colonial mindset.” This discourse of “colonial mentality,” similar to the “return of people’s hearts” concept of 2017, connoted a sense of “mismatch” and “lagged-ness” between the normative and the “actual” time. For example, CD described the West’s criticism of the HKNSL as “an affliction and psychological condition of old imperial powers such as Britain, which can’t let go of their ‘golden eras’” (CD, 4 July 2020). Likewise, Hong Kong’s last colonial governor, Chris Patten, who had criticized Beijing’s handling of the Anti-ELAB Movement, was accused of “indulg[ing] in the faded glory of colonialism and refus[ing] to face the reality that it has been 22 years since Hong Kong’s return to its motherland” (CD, 8 July 2019). Thus, Britain’s self-claimed “moral obligations” to Hong Kong perpetuated an outmoded “colonial rule and colonial responsibility” that “lagged behind” in time (CD, 4 July

2020). As CD (8 July 2019) criticized, “time marches on, but there are always those ... who are unable to keep up.”

Discussions

This study examines discourses about postcolonial temporalities in Chinese and British anniversary journalism of the Hong Kong handover. In what follows, we aim to extract more theoretical insights from the empirical data by discussing Michel Foucault’s idea of the “regime of truth.” Applying this notion, we propose a systemic framework for understanding the multiple temporal statements about Hong Kong’s dilemmatic postcolonial condition.

The Truth Regime of Postcolonial Temporalities

Foucault introduced the notion of a “‘regime’ of truth” that describes the “circular relation” between “truth” and “systems of power.”⁴⁹ He understands the regime of truth as the “‘general politics’ of truth” that comprises:

the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded values in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as truth.⁵⁰

This passage shows that the truth regime concept foregrounds the co-constitution of discursive truth statements, “multiple forms of constraints” and structurally placed social actors weaved in power networks.⁵¹ Although Foucault invoked the “truth regime” in his 1976 interview to describe the relationships between scientific discourse and the changing status of Western intellectuals,⁵² this concept can be extended to wider processes beyond the scientific realm. For example, Lorna Weir argues that the “regime of truth” is “partitioned” by “radically heterogenous” and competitive “truth formulae” that govern the systemic formulation of truth in particular domains.⁵³ For Weir, truth is not judged by a singular criterion; instead, it is understood differently in science, religion, political discourse and everyday life, where it is governed by competing “truth formulae” that normalize the relationships between the presentation and representation of truth, truth and non-truth, and the speaking and spoken subjects.⁵⁴

In particular, media tightly sanction the formulation of truthful knowledge about time for its ability to reproduce the state’s power, which necessitates the creation, through a highly selective “temporal arrangement” of the past, present and future,⁵⁵ of an image of “a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history.”⁵⁶ If media representations of postcolonial temporalities constitute truthful statements in the Foucauldian regime, what is their distinct “truth formula” connected to the journalistic mode of knowledge production? As previous sections have shown, Chinese and British anniversary journalism was embedded in drastically different national contexts, making it difficult to abstract a singular “journalistic truth formula.” Instead, the two countries’ press utilized

49 Foucault 1980, 132.

50 Ibid, 131.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Weir 2008, 367, 374.

54 Ibid. Weir distinguishes these truth formulae into two master types, veridic and symbolic, each with different presentation and representation, truth and non-truth, and the enunciatory and enunciated subjects.

55 Mitchell 1991, 95.

56 Anderson 1983, 26.

different “truth formulae” that coordinated disparate social actors, systemic constraints and journalistic routines. First, they mobilized distinct discursive authorities to validate “truth,” with the Chinese press drawing more than the British press on non-journalistic, especially “co-opted” authors (elite politicians, scholars, renowned businesspeople), compared with the heavy reliance of the British press on professional journalists. Second, the Chinese and British press encountered different types of systemic constraints in the formulation of truth, with the Chinese press being subject to the systematic “command communication”⁵⁷ and the British press relying on the “interpretive consensus” of the newsroom.⁵⁸ Finally, the making of truthful knowledge was sanctioned by distinct news routines, where Chinese anniversary journalism was subject to more extended periods of pre-planning and ritualistic “rehearsing” than the British newspapers’ event-focused style.

While systemic comparisons of the truth formulae in Chinese and British anniversary journalism merit further studies, the remaining part of the discussion focuses on one specific aspect of the regime of truth: the discursive “truth statements” in historical contexts. Accordingly, we conceptualize two co-constitutive axes in constructing Hong Kong’s postcolonial temporalities: temporal mode and ideological appraisal.

A two-axial framework of postcolonial temporalities

By integrating Foucault’s insights on truth and power with the present analysis, this study argues that it is not possible to separate the “formal structures” of temporal constructs (continuities, ruptures, trajectories, stasis) from their “general politics” vis-à-vis issues of legitimacy, normativity and power.⁵⁹ Thus, we propose distinguishing two mutually constitutive axes in the truthful statements about postcolonial temporalities. *Temporal mode* refers to the “formal structure” of time and describes “the relationship of difference and sameness, rupture and continuity” across past, present and future.⁶⁰ *Ideological appraisal* refers to the “general politics” of time, where the temporal modes are cast as being normative or abnormal, legitimate or illegitimate, thereby implying ideological demands for the maintenance, reinforcement or transformation of existing conditions.⁶¹ This two-axial framework can be illuminated with the syntagmatic–paradigmatic distinction in semiotics.⁶² The syntagmatic axis relates to how basic elements (signs) within a semiotic system are temporally or spatially organized in “syntaxes.” Postcolonial temporalities entail the syntactic ordering of two signs – colonial past and postcolonial present – using at least three “syntaxes” of historical relations or “temporal modes”: continuity, ambiguity and discontinuity. The paradigmatic axis relates to the discursive “contents” of basic signifying elements that convey intertextual meanings. In postcolonial temporalities, this axis concerns the discursive constructions of the colonial past – as nostalgic, haunting or traumatic – and postcolonial present – as depriving, (il)legitimate or promising, thereby conveying “ideological appraisal” of signs and their syntagmatic relations (temporal modes). Like the two semiotic axes, temporal mode and ideological appraisal always work in tandem, where relocation along any of the two lines will completely shift the entire discursive message about postcolonial temporalities. Using this two-dimensional framework, we can systematically organize all temporal claims identified in the data in [Figures 1 and 2](#).

The British and Chinese coverage of the first anniversary shared significant similarities in highlighting “legitimate continuities” between colonial and postcolonial Hong Kong, emphasizing the

57 Wu’s paper on editorial formulation in PD offers a glimpse into the systematic “command communication” that synchronises China’s state-run media with the Party centre. Wu 1994.

58 Zelizer 1993; Tuchman 1978.

59 Foucault 1980, 131.

60 Shohat 2006, 239.

61 Foucault 1980, 131.

62 Saussure 1983; Culler 1985. We thank a reviewer of *The China Quarterly* for inspiring us to explain the two dimensions with semiotics.

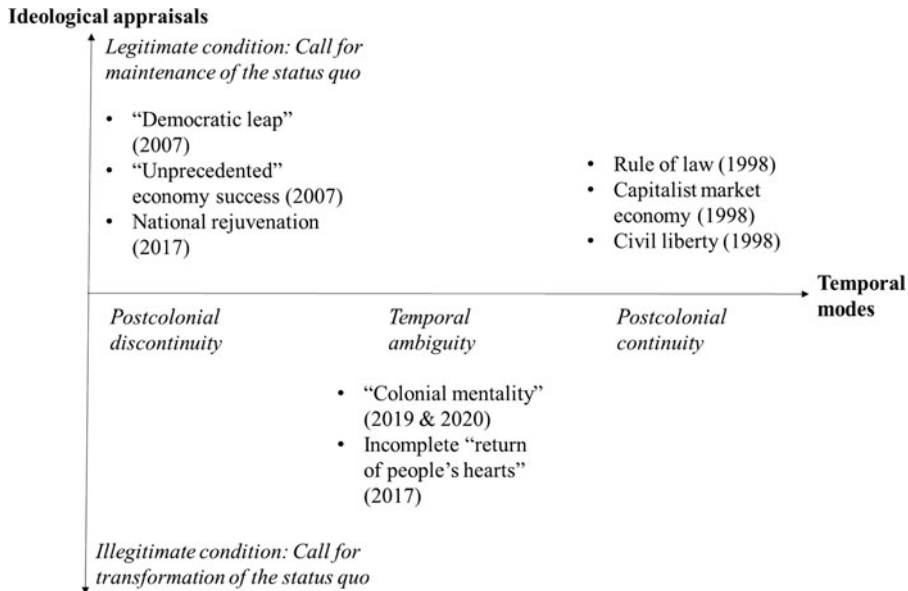


Figure 1: Postcolonial Temporal Discourses in Chinese Anniversary Journalism of the Hong Kong Handover

Notes: Numbers in brackets refer to the first anniversary year at which the temporal narrative in question was identified.

“successful” maintenance of the city’s rule of law, capitalist market economy and civil liberty after 1997. Postcolonial continuity was constructed as a normative ideal and a reality to be celebrated. This shared focus, however, reflected the two countries’ different ideopolitical interests after 1997. The temporal narrative in the British press epitomized what John Flowerdew terms the “discourse of colonial withdrawal,” which “create[d] a myth about the legacy which would remain after the British withdrawal.”⁶³ By highlighting Hong Kong’s continuous embodiments of Western liberal values after 1997, the British press valorized Britain’s lasting legacies in its former colony before its “honourable” withdrawal from Hong Kong.⁶⁴ The same narrative in the Chinese press, nevertheless, reflected a need for political legitimacy during a “crisis.”⁶⁵ The 1997 transition coincided with the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1998; the Chinese press was, therefore, eager to isolate the economic downturn and political distrust from Hong Kong’s new political order. This was performed through a framing of “continuity” from 1997, implying that Beijing, which had inherited Britain’s Hong Kong policies, was “not to blame” for the emerging troubles.

Like the first anniversary, in both the British and Chinese newspapers, the tenth anniversary was marked by a “positive” framing of Hong Kong’s postcolonial transition, celebrating the former colony’s post-1997 socioeconomic success. However, the British and Chinese press linked this shared evaluation of the status quo to divergent temporal modes. While the British press attributed Hong Kong’s economic successes to the *continuation* of its “old” socioeconomic structures – British common law, laissez-faire market economy and international “metropolitanism” – the Chinese press cast the same developments within a *discontinuous* temporal frame, attributing Hong Kong’s economic achievements to the OCTS and Beijing’s generous support since the handover. A similar temporal disparity appeared in news recounts of Hong Kong’s democratic progress. While the Chinese press projected a “legitimately discontinuous” discourse of a post-1997 “democratic leap forward,” contrasting the democratic “new” Hong Kong with Britain’s “dark” colonial rule, the

63 Flowerdew 1997, 454.

64 Ibid.

65 So 2011.

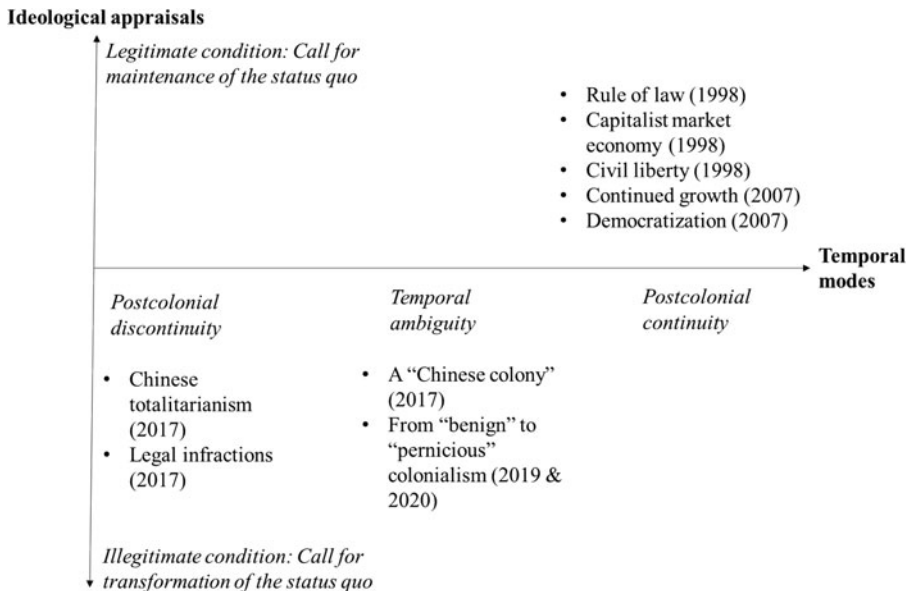


Figure 2: Postcolonial Temporal Discourses in British Anniversary Journalism of the Hong Kong Handover
 Notes: Numbers in brackets refer to the first anniversary year at which the temporal narrative in question was identified.

British press constructed democratization as an “unfinished task” initiated by Britain and extending continuously into the “now” moment, thereby transcending the postcolonial transition.⁶⁶

The 20th anniversary (2017) was marked by paradigmatic shifts in both the Chinese and British newspapers’ temporal discourses. Chinese newspapers recalibrated Hong Kong from “local” to “national” time scales by integrating its postcolonial transitions into narratives concerning the “Chinese dream.” Although China has propagated national rejuvenation discourses since the 1990s,⁶⁷ the dominant nationalist temporalities in 2017 formed part of a refocus from “two systems” to “one country” in China’s Hong Kong policy. This refocus was epitomized by a 2014 OCTS White Paper (“*Yiguo liangzhi*” *zai Xianggang tebie xingzhengqu de shijian baipishu* “一国两制”在香港特别行政区的实践白皮书) asserting Beijing’s “comprehensive jurisdiction” (*quanmian guanzhiquan* 全面管治权) over Hong Kong, and the CCP’s 13 August 2014 Decision (831 *jueding*, 831 决定) on election candidates for the post of Hong Kong’s chief executive.⁶⁸ These policy shifts entailed a temporal remodelling of Hong Kong, replacing normative continuities in the city’s colonial legacies, implied by the “two systems,” with the radical discontinuities of returning to “one country.” Thus, Hong Kong’s postcolonial ruptures were connected not only to its local experience of democratic progress and economic rise but also to the great historical contrast between “national humiliation” and “rejuvenation.”

In contrast, in its 20th anniversary coverage the British press shifted emphases from normative continuities to illegitimate discontinuities, whereby the liberal systems of Britain’s “most successful modern colony” were gradually “stripped away” by China. This postcolonial discourse of illegitimate discontinuity was often conjoined with a colonial metaphor recurring in the 20th, 22nd and 23rd anniversary reports, which described Hong Kong as being, or increasingly becoming, a *de facto* “Chinese colony.” This metaphor entailed an ambivalent temporality marked by the simultaneity

⁶⁶ For a comprehensive review of Hong Kong’s protracted democratization, see Sing 2004.

⁶⁷ Wang 2014.

⁶⁸ Scott 2017. The 13 August 2014 Decision stipulated that all election candidates for the chief executive be pre-screened by a pro-Beijing nominating committee to ensure that they “love the country (China) and love Hong Kong.”

of postcolonial continuities and discontinuities. On one hand, it implied a present condition of sameness to and continuity of the colonial past, which was considered objectionable under normative perceptions of decolonization as a temporally discrete, emancipatory project. On the other hand, the colonial metaphor also hinted at postcolonial discontinuities by demarcating Britain's "benign" colonialism from China's "pernicious imperialism."

The Chinese press mobilized the same colonial metaphor on the 20th, 22nd and 23rd anniversaries, albeit with opposing ideological aims. At the height of Hong Kong's radicalization after the 2014 Umbrella Movement (*Yusan yundong* 雨伞运动)⁶⁹ and the 2016 Mong Kok unrest (*Wangjiao saoluan* 旺角骚乱),⁷⁰ PD advocated an ongoing project for the "return of people's hearts" in the 20th anniversary, which lamented Hong Kong people's lack of national responsibility and historical awareness, problematizing a fragmented and paradoxical temporality where sovereignty and institutional discontinuities were annulled by continuing "colonial consciousness." The Chinese press also criticized Western countries' Hong Kong policies for perpetuating a "colonial mentality" and "lagging behind" in nostalgia for a lost "golden era" of colonial imperialism. Specifically, the convergence of anti-Western and decolonization discourses in the 20th and 21st anniversaries reflected China's response to the internationalization of the Anti-ELAB Movement, which resulted in Western sanctions against Chinese officials.⁷¹

Despite their opposing ideological connotations, there are unexpected similarities in the Chinese and British uses of colonial metaphors. Both highlight a mismatch between postcolonial Hong Kong's "normative" and "actual" temporalities, a mismatch that requires resolving through action and change. In the British press, this mismatch was between the "glorious end of the British empire" and the city's "return" to colonialism. In the Chinese press, the mismatch was between normative expectations regarding Hong Kong's anti-colonial emancipation and the continuing "mental colonialism" of the city's residents and ex-colonizers. These temporal discourses differ drastically from the emphases on "legitimate continuities" present during the first anniversary, signalling a discursive shift regarding Hong Kong's postcolonial temporalities in Chinese and British anniversary reports. Instead of celebrating the former colony's maintenance of benign colonial legacies, the Chinese and British press now supported radical change in the city's status quo, which diverged, in different ways, from normative expectations of an idealized "post-colonial" (with the hyphen) time.

Conclusion

Owing to Hong Kong's historical dilemma that affords multiple interpretive potentials, discourses about the city's postcolonial temporalities are pluralistic and dynamic. By analysing temporal discourses in Chinese and British elite newspapers across five anniversaries of the Hong Kong hand-over, we show that Hong Kong's multiple postcolonial temporalities were inherently controversial and contesting. Sometimes temporalities were celebrated as part of the grand schemes of "national rejuvenation" or "honourable retreat"; at other times, they were condemned and outcasted, denounced as "lagging behind" or for being "borrowed times" yet to be incorporated in "our history." To understand the complex dynamics of postcolonial temporalities, this study proposed a two-axial framework that comprises temporal modes – the "formal structures" of postcolonial continuities/ruptures and sameness/difference – and ideological appraisals – the "general politics" where temporal modes are (il)legitimized and (ab)normalized. While, in 1998, the Chinese and

69 The Umbrella Movement was a political action that centred on protesters occupying Hong Kong's city centre for 79 days in the name of "genuine universal suffrage." This movement is widely considered a watershed event in Hong Kong's activism. See Ortmann 2015.

70 The Mong Kok unrest refers to a violent clash between protesters and Hong Kong police. For scholars and observers, this incident marked the violent radicalization of Hong Kong's localist and anti-establishment activism. See Kwong 2016.

71 Ku 2020.

British press shared a significant consensus regarding the “legitimate continuities” of Hong Kong’s colonial legacies, this consensus was later undermined by ideological contestations about the city’s postcolonial ruptures and differences which fostered drastically different interpretations.

This study has two shortcomings. First, although Foucault understands the “regime of truth” as the convergence of truth statements, systemic constraints and structurally placed actors, this study primarily focuses on the first component of truthful statements about time.⁷² To fully understand the mediated regime of postcolonial temporalities, future studies could delve deeper into the “production end” of anniversary journalism by examining the media systems, routines, controls and the socialization of journalists in generating postcolonial temporal discourses. Second, future attention could be paid to how Hong Kong people, besides the CCP and British press, interpret their city’s postcolonial transition as lived and/or intergenerational memories. After all, only by foregrounding indigenous voices in recollecting the past can we unsettle lingering colonial histories and encourage genuine “indigenous futurities” that break free from the imperial straitjacket in our temporal imaginings.⁷³

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⁷² Foucault 1980.

⁷³ Bartels et al. 2019.

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