Newspaper representation and power relations in infrastructure projects: a case study of Hong Kong's Express Rail Link

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Abstract

This paper explores newspapers' representation of different actors in infrastructure projects, and analyses the power relations between them through a case study in Hong Kong. The case in question is the highly controversial *Express Rail Link,* which connects Hong Kong to the extensive high-speed railway network in mainland China. It finds that under an immature democratic system, opponents' political power and free press play important roles in forcing the government to make concessions outside the formal framework. The methodological framework employs a concept that takes media representation as a reflection of power (Van Dijk, 1996), and three theories seldom used in the planning field – Indexing Theory (Bennett, 1990), Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) and Law of Anticipated Reactions (Zelditch and Ford, 1994). A new method for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), in the form of colour charts, is developed to portray the competition for representation in newspapers of different actors, paying special attention to power inequalities and which actors gain access to newspaper discourse and how they use it to convey specific messages. In this study, 500 newspaper articles (from two key newspapers - *SCMP and Apple Daily*) and 75 government publications in Hong Kong are analysed.

1. Introduction

Infrastructure projects are associated with high costs, long-term planning, and their environmental significance. Thus, uncertainty and controversies play a big part in the decision making process. This paper seeks to ask how different actors are represented in the media, and explores the power relations between them as revealed in the pictures the media choose to adopt. It contributes to the existing literature on infrastructure and megaprojects by offering a way to look at power relations through media representation. Two media

theories—Indexing (Bennett, 1990) and Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1972)—are used to study the range of debate in the media, and the Law of Anticipated Reactions (Zelditch and Ford, 1994) in social psychology is employed to look at the power play between actors. Van Dijk's (1996) concept of media representation as measure of power is the underlying assumption of the paper.

1.1 Express Rail Link

The Express Rail Link (XRL), measuring 26km, forms part of the 16,000km national high-speed railway network in China. The government approved implementation of the project in October 2009. Subsequently, the Finance Committee in Hong Kong's parliamentary body Legislative Council (LegCo) approved the funding on January 16, 2010 at 31 votes to 21.

The government claimed that the railway would bring enormous economic benefits to the city by linking it up to the national high-speed railway network (LegCo, 2009). The construction of the railway has sparked many controversies. A major one concerns Choi Yuen Village— discussed in the following subsection. Other issues include the costs and benefits of the railway, with costs having ballooned from HK$39.5 billion in April 2008 to HK$53.7 billion in September 2009 (LegCo, 2010), as well as the location of the terminal (Ma, 2012), and the arrangements of control point setups (SCMP, November 22, 2015). Big protests were staged outside LegCo during the discussion of the bill, and the evening when the bill was passed, protesters encircled the building and government officials, trapping lawmakers for hours.

Construction of XRL started late January 2010 and was supposed to be completed by 2015. However, it was delayed twice, and the latest date of completion is the third quarter of 2018. New uncertainties also arose as the government faced major hurdles in seeking additional funding from LegCo to complete the project (SCMP, February 5, 2016).

1.11 Choi Yuen Village

Special attention is given to Choi Yuen Village because of the intense power play involved in its relocation. The village is located in Shek Kong, New Territories in Hong Kong, where an emergency rescue station and stabling sidings are to be built for XRL. The village is referred to as 'Tsoi Yuen' and 'Choi Yuen' interchangeably in *South China Morning Post (SCMP),* the major English-language newspaper in Hong Kong, but consistently as 'Choi Yuen' in government publications. In this paper the name 'Choi Yuen Village' (CYV) is used to avoid confusion.

The villagers are categorised as 'non-indigenous' although they have lived there for generations. Many of their houses are regarded as temporary buildings or squatter huts, meaning that if the land where their houses are on is reclaimed for development, only minimal compensation will be paid (Ma, 2012). The system is deemed unfair by many, and the villagers felt that they were not given enough chance to voice opposition to the project. Many vowed they would not accept compensation, demolition or removal. With the help of a group of young protesters, the villagers staged a series of protests, gradually receiving media attention. In October 2009, the government offered the villagers a new compensation package, under which they could choose to receive an ex-gratia cash allowance of HK$600,000 for each household, or an ex-gratia cash allowance of HK$500,000, plus the opportunity to purchase a subsidised flat without being subject to the normally required means test.

1.2 Transport infrastructure: controversies and power relations

Mega transport projects often face big controversies, and the contentions are often associated with costs, transparency, consultation processes and the projects' social and

environmental impacts (Keyes and Fellman, 1969; Valve, 1999; Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius and Rothengatter, 2003; Flyvbjerg, Skamris and Buhl, 2003; Novy and Peters, 2012). Protests and controversies surrounding big transport infrastructure projects are documented by various writers, and those that caught most attention include the Channel Tunnel between France and the UK, the Öresund link between Sweden and Denmark, Stuggart 21 in Germany and a few highway projects in the US (Keyes and Fellman, 1969; Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius and Rothengatter, 2003; Rootes, 2003; Novy and Peters, 2012).

In particular, Stuggart 21 shares a lot of similarities with the XRL. Big protests participated by people from all walks of life and wider political implications are observed in both projects. Also, they are both facing risks of being abandoned amid construction because of surging costs. The saga of Stuggart is well documented by Novy and Peters (2012), who examined the dynamics of participation, politics and power in the anti-Stuggart 21 campaign. The authors noted that contemporary urban development projects were characterised by a mix of uses (economic, environmental and social), a variety of financing techniques, and a combination of public-and-private sector initiators. They pointed out that decision making in mega projects was often top-down, and in Stuggart 21, public participation only took place in the midst of the planning process when the key characteristics had long been decided.

Novy and Peters (2012) saw the struggle surrounding the project a power competition to dominate the public debate. The elements of power play were also highlighted in Schmidt-Thomé's and Mäntysalo's (2014) study of frames in Stuggart 21, and in an Öresund link study by Linnros and Hallin (2001). Flyvbjerg, Bruzelius and Rothengatter (2003) explained that interests and power relations involved in megaprojects were typically very strong because of the enormous sums of money at stake, many jobs, environmental impacts, and national

prestige, among other issues. They further stated that power play, instead of commitment to deliberative ideas, was often what characterised megaproject development.

Another project worth mentioning due to the similarities is the UK High Speed 2 (HS2). The idea of HS2 was floated in 2008 to 2009, and HS2 Ltd was established in January 2009 to study the proposals (Butcher, 2016). The first phase connects London and Birmingham and construction is set to begin in 2017, while the second phase extends to Leeds and Manchester. Like in the XRL project, costs had increased significantly. In 2010, it was estimated that HS2 would cost £20 billion, but in 2012 costs went up to £32.6 billion, and by 2013 it was £42.6 billion. The price tag is a major source of disagreement in the parliament, with the Labour Party at one point threatening to withdraw support. Doubts are also cast over the project's ability to achieve its aim of rebalancing the economic discrepancies between the north and the south (The Sun, September 9, 2013; The Guardian, January 14, 2014). The second reading for the hybrid bill to start the construction of the first phase was put to vote in the House of Commons in April 2014, and it was approved with a vote of 452 to 41 (as noted in the Parliament's website on April 29, 2014). Parliamentary processes continue after that. While there are not as many public protests, and the project has not started yet, it seems that in this case, the power games are between the two key political parties with now a further complication of the UK's discussion to leave the UK and the perceived lack of financial support that otherwise would come from Europe.

1.3 Summary and Structure

The above has introduced the case to be studied and the importance of power play in mega infrastructure projects. This paper focuses on the competition for representation in newspapers between different actors, and seeks to reveal the power relations between them.

XRL is characterised by the big controversies, protests and political implications also common in other megaprojects, and it is hoped that this paper can shed light on other similar projects. The immature democratic system in otherwise highly developed Hong Kong also implies that this paper may have further implications on other places where political systems and democracy are yet to be consolidated. That includes developing nations, where consultation is broader and consensus difficult to achieve. In the rest of the paper, theories to be employed will be reviewed, followed by an introduction of methodology, presentation of the results, discussion, and finally, a short conclusion.

2.   Concept and Theories

This paper uses a concept and three theories that the planning field may be unfamiliar with but very relevant in the studies of media and power. Van Dijk's (1996) concept of media as a measure of power is often used in Critical Discourse Analysis. Agenda Setting Theory (McCombs and Shaw, 1972), and Indexing Theory (Bennett, 1990) are often used in examining the range of topics covered in newspapers, while the Law of Anticipated Reactions (Zelditch and Ford, 1994) is frequently employed to explore power relations. This section starts with an introduction of the concept, and then introduces the three theories in-depth and briefly discusses other theories that have been considered. A table summarising the concept and theories are presented at the end.

2.1 Discourse, Media and Power

Power can be gained, consolidated or lost in multiple ways. Discourse and the media are some of these means. Van Dijk (1996) stated that power was based on privileged access to valued social resources, and that includes preferential access to public discourse and communication. According to the author, measures of discourse access could be faithful

indicators of power of social groups and their members. These measures could include who had preferential access to journalists, and who were quoted and described, as these factors could affect whose opinion was able to influence the public (Van Dijk, 1996). Thus, access to discourse and opportunities to be represented do not only help gain or consolidate power, but are also reflection of actual power in other aspects. The author further suggested that Critical Discourse Analysis, in this sense, was thus an important diagnostic tool for the assessment of social and political dominance.

This concept is seldom used in planning studies, but since megaprojects are often reported in the media, the concept offers the potential to reveal the underlying power relations. Outside the planning field, Van Dijk (1996) used the lack of presence in newspapers of ethnic minorities as an example of the concept, while Lillqvist, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2014) studied power relations in social media discourse.

The above implies just splitting newspapers into positive or negative will give a limited picture of power, as a positive or negative description is just one of the many frames that an author could adopt (Matthes and Kohring, 2008). It is important to identify which actors are represented in newspapers and whose pictures are presented to find out who is in the upper hand of the power game at a certain point of time.

2.2 Agenda Setting Theory (AST)

AST concerns how the media agenda influences the public agenda (McCombs, 2014), and is first examined by McCombs and Shaw (1972) on the 1986 US presidential election in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, with the central hypothesis being the mass media set the agenda of issues for a political campaign by influencing the salience of issues among voters. It concerns both 'what the public think' and 'how the public think about it' (Ghanem, 1997). Advancing the

theory, Wanta and Hu (1994) found that credibility of the media indirectly affected the agenda setting effect.

The theory has since been tested in studies of many areas of news, including environmental and urban (Campbell, 2004; Cuadrado-Ballesteros, Frías-Aceituno, and Martínez-Ferraro, 2014). It is argued that because of readers' lack of direct experience in environmental issues, agenda setting in the area is stronger (Zucker, 1978; Brown and Deegan, 1998). The concept of agenda setting is also frequently used in urban policy studies, but mostly in the form of how actors influence the planning agenda (Healy et al, 1997; Groth and Corijn, 2005; Olesen, 2012).

In terms of political processes, studies have found the media system and policy process were strongly related, policy makers are sensitive to media agendas and that the shifts in government ad media attention tended to come in alarmed and urgent bursts (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Bonafont and Baumgartner, 2013). In general, there is a lack of research about how media could directly influence policy (Wolfe, Jones, and Baumgartner, 2013), and the authors called for more studies incorporating three agendas together—media, policy and political communications.

2.3 Indexing Theory

Contrasting media AST, Indexing Theory states that the media mainly follow what is already in official discourse, and that the range of policy debate in the media is set by government elites implicitly (Bennett, 1990; Jones and Wolfe, 2010). Even if oppositional voices are represented, they stay within the contours of the debate in the elite circle. Bennett (1990), in an American context, said that the theory worked best when it came to military decisions, foreign affairs, trade and macroeconomic policy, and exceptional circumstances

included civil disobedience, protests or lawless acts that establish negative interpretative contexts for those voices.

Prior to Bennett's work, Hallin (1986) proposed that journalists tended to uphold the dominant political perspective and passing on the views of authorities at face value, assuming they represented the nation as a whole when political consensus seemed to prevail. In situations of political conflict, the media become more detached or adversarial, but they will still stay within the debate boundary within the political establishment. Raphael (2005) suggested that the media, when reporting on social movement actors, passed them through "a filter of official sanction" (237- 238), so "the portions of movement frames that officials did not adopt did not make it into the news" (238).

Indexing Theory is related to democracy, but its relevance is dependent on contexts. In proposing explanations for his theory, Bennett (1990, 2010) said that the media stayed within the boundaries of official discourse partly because the government was democratically elected, so they should represent public opinion and it was the press's job to report on them. Bennett (2010) noted that the theory was formulated under a US context where politics were dominated by two parties with a lack of proportional representation. He noted that in Britain, the range of story diversity was bigger because the press tended to focus on party differences. In addition, oppositional voices have the channels to enter public agenda through the UK tradition of 'question time' in the parliament—a routine shared by Hong Kong (Bennett, 2010). Studies in other countries have also found different levels of indexing and press independence in different contexts (Robinson et al, 2009; Shehata, 2010).

Jones and Wolfe (2010), in comparing AST and Indexing, stated that the question of whether the media lead the government and the reverse could not be answered in a simplistic

manner. It is likely that there is some interplay between government elites and the media, while the agenda setting or indexing effect varied from issue to issue. Noting that, this paper does not aim to uncover the causal relationship between newspaper reports and the decisions government authorities make. Rather, it examines the dynamics between the two through newspapers' representations of different actors.

Combining both theories, the range of debates in the media can be examined in a comprehensive way, as it is likely that the media do not always set the agenda for policy makers, but at the same time, do not always follow official discourse.

2.4 Law of Anticipated Reactions

LAR gives insights on how power comes to play in decision making. According to LAR, a less powerful actor (B) will comply with the preferences of a more powerful actor (A) even if A uses no power, because perceptions of power and expectations of the use of power are functional equivalents of use (Zelditch and Ford, 1994). Actors' expectations, preferences, and subjective expected utility are considered in the theory (Samuel and Zelditch, 1998). 'Power' in the theory is defined as control over rewards and/or penalties that gives an actor the capacity to induce otherwise unwilling compliance by another actor (Samuel and Zelditch, 1998). Although it is employed more often in political studies, the theory was applied by Silva (2002) to study land use change in Portugal. The author pointed out that uncertainty, associated with indecision, in locating major infrastructure hubs constrained individuals' actions according to the perceived power of the government. More recently Vermeule (2012) used the theory to study the atrophy of constitutional powers. The author found that a power not exercised over time tended to become unexercisable, and its use came to seem illegitimate to boundedly informed public.

LAR is strongly relevant to this study because it offers possibilities to examine power play in the context of uncertainties, expectations and potential power. As noted above, power play is an important element in transport infrastructure projects. In the case of XRL, while the government has power over the protesters protecting the village, in the sense of arrest and reduced compensation, the protesters and opponents of the project also have power over the authorities in the sense of stepping up actions and shaking its legitimacy. Thus, LAR has potentials to offer interesting insights on the case, while the case of CYV and XRL could contribute to the literature of the theory when applied two-way.

2.5 Other theories considered

Economic theories including Expected Utility Theory (EUT) (Bernoulli, 1738; von Neumann and Morgenstern, 1944; Savage, 1954), and Prospect Theory (PT) (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979), are also considered in this review. EUT concerns how a rational individual compares options and makes decisions under risks, while PT and its extension of heuristic decision and bounded rationality theories (Simon 1955, 1957, 2000; Tversky, 1969) take into account the irrational aspects of human.

In the field of psychology, Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen 1985, 1987) is also considered. It provides links between belief and behaviour and predicts an individual's intention to engage in certain behaviour at a specific time and space (Ajzen 1985, 1987). TPB was used in the study of information dissemination in environmental issues (Díaz et al, 2012; Lubida et al, 2015), and land use allocation using developers or government as suppliers and residents as consumers (Silva and Wu, 2014). While these are related to this current study, the above theories have little to offer in terms of insights on power representation.

Based on the above, AST, Indexing Theory and LAR are used in this paper, considering the involvement of power play between supporters and opponents for newspaper representation in the case study. It takes the idea of Van Dijk (1996) and assumes that media representation can at least to some extent indicates actors' power status. Table 1 summarises the three theories.

[Table 1 here]

3   Methodology

This study uses the concept of media representation as measure of power, and AST, Indexing Theory and LAR to study newspapers' representations of and power relations between actors in infrastructure projects. To analyse the content of newspaper articles, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is used, given its consideration of wider social factors apart from the texts, and its potential to disentangle power relations. This section first gives a summary of the methods of CDA, and then new method useful in uncovering the amount of media representation of each actor is introduced.

3.1 CDA

There are two main schools of CDA—political economy informed and Foucauldian inspired (Jacobs, 2006; Lees, 2004). The political economy informed strand treats CDA as a tool for uncovering certain hegemony way of thinking and talking about how things should be done that serve certain vested interest (Lees, 2004). According to Richardson (2007), this strand requires CDA to draw out the form and function of the text, and its relation with its production, consumption, and to the wider society.

The second strand, Foucauldian inspired and based on poststructural theory, considers CDA part of a process through which things and identities get constructed (Lees, 2004). CDA of this strand examines inequalities of power, how different meaning or discourses compete for influence in society, and how structural changes in society can be conceptualised as shifts in the relative influence of different discourses. (Sharp and Richardson, 2001).

CDA is widely used as a tool to in media, planning and environmental studies (Van Dijk, 1988; Sharp and Richardson, 2001; Lees, 2004; Richardson, 2007). It goes beyond mere content analysis, and takes the wider social context into consideration (Jäger, 2001; Hajer and Versteeg, 2005; Jacobs, 2006; Richardson, 2007). Hajer and Versteeg (2005) pointed out that the strength of the method lied in its capacity to reveal the role of language in politics, and the embeddedness of language in practices. They said CDA appealed to environmental policy research because such policies were often complex.

Application of CDA in planning and environmental policy research is outlined by Hajer and Versteeg (2005), Jacobs (2006) and Lees (2004), with Beauregard's (1993) *Voices of Decline* often identified as one of the earliest works (Boyle and Rogerson, 2001; Lees, 2004; Jäger, 2001). In a study of the Öresund link between Sweden and Denmark, Linnros and Hallin (2001) stated that discursive formations were not isolated domains of social life, but were internally related to other aspects such as power, and social relations. The authors identified 'discursive arenas', where texts utterances or other forms of discursive and social practices were performed. In the field of critical human geography, the Fouclaudian inspired strand is arguably the dominant method, although very often the two strands are mixed (Lees, 2004).

The theoretical framework of CDA in media research is elaborated by several seminal studies. For example, Van Dijk (1988) introduced different dimensions to be analysed in a

media discourse study, including grammatical aspects, the role of knowledge, superstructures, and relevant structuring. Fowler (1991) presented the linguistic tools for news discourse analysis, and Pan and Kosicki (1993) studied framing in news discourse.

Following the tradition of CDA in planning studies, this paper adopts the Foucauldian strand, paying special attention to power inequalities and which actors gain access to newspaper discourse. However, instead of going into detailed linguistic analysis, this paper focuses on how different actors compete for representation in the newspapers by developing colour charts that show which side—supporters or opponents—wins in the discourse competition at certain time. The method is explained in the next subsection. Attention level in the media and government publications is also studied by looking at how the numbers of newspaper articles and government publications change with time.

3.2 The colour charts

As discussed above, when examining power relations through media representation, it is not sufficient to merely categorise articles into positive and negative. It is important to see which actors are represented, and whose picture gets across to the public. Thus, in this paper, articles are colour-coded according to the actors represented.

Colour squares of blue, yellow and green are used to construct colour charts that portray discourse competitions in the four newspapers:

- Blue: government discourses and those in support of the construction of the railways
- Yellow: opponents and those advocating for major changes
- Green: undeterminable or equal representation

Each square represents one newspaper article and they are plotted with respect to time. In black-and-white print, blue is represented by the darkest shade, yellow the lightest, and green in the middle. The charts provide insights on how newspapers' representation of actors change with time, and from that, how the power balance changes.

The subjectivity involved in choosing colours is acknowledged, as in other forms of discourse analysis (Matthes and Kohring, 2008). In the future, a more complicated colour scheme with different shades representing a finer categorisation of actors could be introduced. In applying the colour coding described above, special attention is given to an article's headline and first paragraph as they represent the main theme of the article, while the rest of the text are usually supplementary information (Van Dijk, 1985). The following summarises the principles in the present analysis:

- Headline and lead (first paragraph) are given more weight. In general, a paragraph at an upper position in an article is considered more important. Therefore, for example, if only government actors are mentioned in the headline and lead, a blue square will be chosen even if opponents are mentioned further down. However, there could be exceptional cases as explained in the point below.

- In choosing the colours, the questions of whose discourse it is, and who the main speakers are, are pursued. This means apart from considering who are mentioned, attention is also paid to how those discourses are portrayed. This is especially important in the analysis of tabloids, because at times they use strong and negative phrases to describe government discourses, instead of presenting them in a plain way, as in elite broadsheets.

- It is important to note that the analysis is about whose discourse is represented, but not whether it is positive or negative. An article could be represented with a blue square, but negative. Stories about government's announcements of soaring construction costs are examples of this.

- Finally, stories in which the main actors are unnamed sources are generally represented by green squares, because their identities and motives are unknown. For example, when anonymous government sources are cited, they could leak information because they oppose the project (in this case yellow), but they could also do the same to test public reaction (in this case blue).

When a group of actors is more represented than the others over a certain period, thus more squares of the associated colour in the chart, it implies that the group had the upper hand in the power game at that time (see Section 2.1). After plotting the charts, Indexing Theory and AST will be used to explore the level of attention the newspapers give different actors. LAR will then be applied for analysis of power relations.

3.3 Limitations

Although the colour charts are believed to provide an easy portrait of power relations in planning issues, there are a few limitations which could be difficult to mitigate.

The first relates to the methods of colour charts, compared to quantitatively counting the number of times each actor is represented. While the colour charts give a convenient overview and visually are easy to understand, some nuance may be lost as the analysis is done in the unit of articles. Some actors maybe consistently quoted, but their voices would not be considered if they stay in the background part of a report. Also, the division of pro-XRL and

anti-XRL is general and specific views or frames are not considered. Generally, the information the charts could provide is limited.

With regards to the theories that form the methodological framework, economic theories reviewed above but not adopted could have provided better insights into the causal mechanism of certain behaviour. TPB could also have provided more detailed explanations of certain behaviour and linked it to the actors' belief. The methodology adopted by this study, however, only provides a framework to study certain power phenomena. There are many factors the analysis through lenses of media theories and LAR cannot take into consideration. It does not try to provide a comprehensive picture of the causal mechanism.

Despite these limitations, the authors maintain that the current methodology provides an easy starting point for the analysis of power in planning issues. By bringing in theories from other fields, it provides a better rounded picture of power in the planning field.

3.4 Data

The XRL saga is widely reported in newspapers. Coverage of two publications in Hong Kong is studied. The two Hong Kong publications are picked according to their popularity, perceived credibility and political stance. In Hong Kong, English-language South China Morning Post (SCMP) is consistently perceived to be the most credible newspaper (CCPOS, 2014), while Chinese-language Apple Daily is one of the most popular newspapers (Mathews, Ma, and Lui, 2007). The two papers are perceived to be in different ends of the political spectrum. Apple Daily is considered more anti-government and anti-China (Mathews, Ma, and Lui, 2007), while SCMP more pro-establishment and China-friendly (Lai, 2007).

For government discourses, only those actively released by the government are considered, so speeches at the LegCo in Hong Kong are excluded, because in those occasions, they were prompted and obliged to speak or respond.

In terms of the time period, protest development and the voting date in the LegCo is considered. Choi Yuen villagers were first told to vacate in November 2008 (Ma, 2012), and the XRL project was put to vote in January 2010. Therefore, newspaper and government discourses from October 1, 2008 to February 28, 2010 are analysed to include the time period just before protests started and just after the project was approved. Only the print editions of the newspapers are considered. Newspaper articles and government publications in Hong Kong are accessed through archive Wisenews.

In total, 500 newspaper articles—201 in South China Morning Post and 299 in Apple Daily— are analysed. For government press releases and speeches, 75 are studied.

4   Results

This section presents the descriptive results of the analysis, laying the groundwork for more theoretical discussions in the next section. It first discusses the general trend of the number of newspaper articles and government press releases and speeches, then presents the colour charts, and finally gives an overview of the discourses.

4.1 General trend

Figure 1 summarises the trends of the two newspapers and government. The two newspapers follow largely the same trend with a small peak in October, 2009—when the government decided to increase compensation for the villagers—and a sharper peak in January, 2010—when the bill for the construction was passed. Comparing the newspapers

with government press releases and speeches, there are substantially fewer government publications than newspaper stories. From July onwards, the government essentially follows the same trend with milder peaks. However, before that, in proportion to the peak, the government is much more active than the media in disseminating information about the project to the public.

[Figure 1 here]

4.2 The colour charts

Figure 2 shows the discourse competition between pro-XRL actors and those against it or campaigning for major change in the two Hong Kong papers. Only the articles directly related to the project are considered, representing 125 in *SCMP,* 190 in *Apple Daily*. In reading the charts, each square represents a story and the number above or below it corresponds to the publication month. Front-page lead articles are pointed out in black, and the headlines in red (or the lighter shade in black-and-white print) are stories that indicate significant policy changes or events that did not make it to the most prominent spot in the newspaper.

From the *SCMP* chart, it can be observed that opponents and actors with serious doubts about the project are better represented until September. After that, the government and pro-XRL actors start to gain prominence ahead of the major compensation package change. Afterwards, the two colours are fairly evenly distributed until the bill is passed on January 16, with each side alternately receives more attention for some period than the other.

The Apple Daily chart in general has a more yellowish shade. Government and pro-XRL voices receive some attention till September but after that it dwindles. The large area of green shade in January in the middle of heated debate around the voting date is largely due to the

newspaper's frequent practice of critically presenting government discourses by, for example, leading the article with protesters' interpretation of it.

[Figure 2 here]

4.3 General discourses

As the more yellowish shade of the Apple Daily chart suggests, villagers and protesters are generally portrayed in a more positive light in the newspaper. Their wishes to stay in their village and continue to farm are described as simple and small (Apple Daily, August 16, 2009). They are portrayed as genuine, non-materialistic, and as the victims in the whole saga (Apple Daily, January 23, 2010; July 2, 2009). On the other hand, the government is described as evil, non-transparent, dodging questions, staging political stunts, cowardly and the intruders (Apple Daily, September, 27, 2009; October 14, 2009; October 17, 2009; October 21, 2009; January 6, 2010).

In the SCMP, although generally, villagers are still portrayed as the victims with little power or choice like in Apply Daily (SCMP, July 2, 2009; July 27, 2009), the pro-establishment and pro-business newspaper mentions more of the economic risks the city would face if the project was delayed (SCMP, January 4, 2010; January 19, 2010). There are also reports on the inadequate consultation and flaws in speed estimation of the XRL (SCMP, June 9, 2009; September 16, 2009). Like in Apple Daily, the final protests are described as festive and protesters enjoying themselves, compared to the solemn atmosphere inside the LegCo chamber (Apple Daily, January 9, 2010; SCMP, January 9, 2010).

In general, voices against the project and outside the official discourse are widely reported, contrary the general assumptions of Indexing Theory. There is some agenda setting effect as the village is absent from government active information dissemination until September 2009, while attention in *SCMP* begins to build up in May 2009, and in *Apple Daily*, in March 2009.

5   Discussion

The above reflects villagers and protesters share at least some power with the government in the saga. This section attempts to explain the phenomena with two reasons, one concerns the protesters as a new political force and the other is about Hong Kong's semi-democratic system. Afterwards, the power relation between the government and protesters is analysed through the lens of LAR.

5.1 Choi Yuen Villagers and protesters as a new political force

Choi Yuen Villagers and the young protesters supporting them can be seen as an uprising political power. They directly challenge the legitimacy of the government, representativeness of the LegCo and pro-development values in Hong Kong (Ma, 2011). Indeed, in some articles, the young protesters are set in the bigger frame of political reform (SCMP, January 20, 2010; SCMP, January 16, 2010; Apple Daily, January 17, 2010; Apple Daily, January 2, 2010). Although they have little power within the institutional framework, their emergence forms part of the legitimacy crisis the government faces (Ma, 2011). Therefore, even though they are not within institution, they remain a force that could potentially shake governmental stability and "influence the outcome" (Bennett, 1990, 107). The government's legitimacy crisis has a lot to do with Hong Kong's semi-democratic system, which will be explained in the next subsection.

The XRL protests also form a bigger picture of the civil society's increasing demand to be engaged in urban planning and heritage conservation (Ng, 2008, 2014). From the protection of Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour, to the fight against mega residential projects blocking ventilation, the new environmental and urban movement constantly force the government to make concessions (Ng, 2008, 2014). In his seminal *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*, Arnstein (1969) explained that in most cases when power was shared, it was wrestled by the powerless and taken by the citizens, instead of given by the authority. The XRL saga forms part of process where Hong Kong's civil society seeks to obtain more power from the traditional power bloc.

5.2 Semi-democracy and free press in Hong Kong

Although Hong Kong is part of China, the former British colony has its own mini constitution, which grants citizens freedom and eventual full democracy. However, Hong Kong is still not fully democratic at the time of writing. The semi-democracy state in Hong Kong and its historical reasons are summarised in Lam, Lui and Wong (2012) and Chan and So (2005). Essentially, the Chief Executive—head of the city—is not directly elected by citizens but by a small election committee with only 400 members at its start (Lee et al, 2013). The LegCo is also dominated by the pro-establishment camp because of a skewed election system that favours representatives of the business sector (Scott, 2007). In particular, Hong Kong's planning system is top-down with little civil involvement, partly because of the government's reliance on the business sector's support and its own vested interest as the biggest landlord (Douay, 2010; Ng, 2008).

Thus, the free press has a special role in the city's semi-democratic system. Without a full democracy, Hong Kong relies on the free press to handle social conflicts, and the media

have a surrogate democracy function (Chan and So, 2005). While media representation is unlikely to be the sole cause of the final increased compensation outside the formal framework, the press may have helped the opponents gain public attention and consolidate their otherwise invisible, unnoticeable, or unrealisable power.

5.3 Law of Anticipated Reactions and power relations

LAR is applied two ways in this study. Defining power in Samuel's and Zelditch's (1998) term, the government's power lies in its legal mandate to 'penalise' the protesters and villagers by forcefully removing them without additional compensation, and its ability to 'reward' them if they stop the campaign and vacate the area by increasing compensation. However, the protesters also have power over the government in the sense that they could 'penalise' the government by mobilising bigger protests (Hung and Ip, 2012) and potentially shake the government's legitimacy through the public's sympathy. In both ways, the other side's preferences are known to each other: the villagers know that the government wants to build the railway through the village as planned, and the government knows that the villagers do not want to move. It is the probability of the use of power that is unknown.

5.31 Government's power over villagers and protesters

Before the bill is passed, the villagers do not know how likely the government is going to simply ignore their requests and raze the village without any extra compensation. As power balance changes, the perceived probability of a forceful removal also changes. After the bill is passed, the decreasing newspaper representation suggests declining power, and the perceived probability of removal without further concession or compensation increases. The villagers then choose to accept the compensation package and propose milder requests of help (Apple Daily, February 2, 2010). This is confirmed by an interview with Chu Hoi-dick, a

central figure in the protests. In Ma (2012). Chu told Ma that after the bill was passed, the villagers understood the chance of getting nothing at all, not even the offered compensation, and more vigorous clearance actions from the government if they insisted on their original appeal. Chu said they then changed their strategy and asked the government to help them re-establish the Choi Yuen community.

5.32 Villagers' and protesters' power over government

For the government, the uncertainty over the villagers' and protesters' power lies in the likelihood of the movement setting off a bigger political movement that challenges the government legitimacy and brings about real political changes. There is also an unknown chance of increased time and effort, thus costs, to convince the villagers to move. As villagers' pictures are presented in the newspapers more, the perceived probability of the villagers' use of power to trigger a bigger political movement increases. The risk-adverse government then offers an increased compensation package in the hope that it could defuse the potential political crisis.

5.5 Summary

The analysis shows how opponents' political power, the free press and immature democratic system interact with each other to bring about outcomes outside the existing formal framework and original official boundary. While the power game and those outcomes may add costs and uncertainty to the government on the one hand; on the other hand, disputes may be settled and the project may be deemed fairer this way under a semi-democratic system where the decision making process may at times be murky.

6. Conclusion

This paper employs the concept that media representation is a measure of power, and three theories—Indexing and AST in media, and LAR in social psychology—to study power relations in the case study of Express Rail Link in Hong Kong. This paper develops a new methodology in Critical Discourse Analysis to portray media representation of different actors over a period of time, which offers a simple and easy way to study power relations in infrastructure projects.

This paper concludes that under an immature democratic system, the government can be forced to make concessions outside the formal framework if protesters gain enough political power and the press remain free. While this may add costs and uncertainty, disputes may be settled and the project may be deemed fairer by affected parties. This could have further implications in developing countries where political structures are still in the process of being consolidated. It also provides valuable lesson to Hong Kong, where the system remains semi democratic, press freedom is at stake, and more infrastructure projects are on the way (Chan and So, 2005; Lam, Lui and Wong, 2012; Freedom House, 2015; Cheung and Wong, 2016).

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