Mediating Global and National Narratives: A Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis of Hong Kong's City Image in *China Daily*'s Greater Bay Area Coverage

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Abstract

As a globally strategic Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China, Hong Kong occupies a critical juncture in regional economic integration and geopolitical narratives. Yet scholarly attention to its mediated city image remains limited. This study employs corpus-based critical discourse analysis (CB-CDA) to examine 35 articles from *China Daily*'s Greater Bay Area (GBA) coverage (April 24, 2023, and December 7, 2024), interrogating how Hong Kong's identity is constructed through economic, administrative, and socio-political lenses. The analysis identifies five dominant thematic frameworks: Economic Hub, Governance and Administration, International Connectivity, Regional Cooperation, and Innovation Ecosystem. Through keyword and collocation networks, findings reveal Hong Kong's dual discursive positioning as a global financial gateway and a synergistic partner in regional integration, underscored by its roles in offshore yuan markets, cross-border talent mobility, and technological innovation. By integrating critical discourse analysis (CDA) with corpus linguistics (CL), this research advances a nuanced understanding of media-driven city image formation, offering insights into the interplay between Hong Kong's historical legacies, China's national strategies, and global economic narratives. The study contributes to policymaking, cultural diplomacy, and sustainable urban development discourses in an era of escalating geopolitical complexity.

Keywords: Hong Kong, city image, media discourse, Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area

1. Introduction

Hong Kong's identity as a global financial, logistical, and cultural nexus has been shaped by its dual status as a Chinese SAR and a historically internationalized metropolis. Over the past decade, its strategic significance has been further amplified by the Greater Bay Area (GBA) initiative, a national policy framework integrating nine Guangdong cities (Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Foshan, Dongguan, Zhongshan, Zhaoqing, Jiangmen) with Hong Kong and Macau. Encompassing 56,000 km² and over 70 million residents, the GBA aims to consolidate regional economic synergies,

enhance infrastructural connectivity, and position itself as a global benchmark for innovation-driven growth. Within this constellation, Hong Kong's role as a mediator between mainland China and global markets renders its city image pivotal to both domestic development agendas and international perceptions of China's geopolitical ambitions.

Despite Hong Kong's socio-economic centrality, scholarly investigations into its mediated representation remain sparse. Existing studies on city image construction have predominantly focused on Western metropolises or mainland Chinese cities, neglecting Hong Kong's unique hybrid identity as a global city navigating "one country, two systems." This lacuna obscures critical insights into how media narratives reconcile Hong Kong's colonial heritage with its evolving role in China's national strategies.

Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis (CB-CDA) approach to analyze *China Daily*'s GBA coverage, interrogating two interrelated questions:

1) How does state-aligned media frame Hong Kong's economic, administrative, and international identity within the GBA context?

2) What socio-political undercurrents shape these discursive constructions?

The findings hold implications for multiple stakeholders: policymakers can leverage insights to refine cross-border governance models; businesses may identify emerging opportunities in finance, technology, and sustainability-related sectors; cultural institutions gain frameworks to navigate identity preservation amid integration. Furthermore, by elucidating the interplay between media discourse and geopolitical realities, this research enriches theoretical debates on urban branding, sovereignty narratives, and the discursive mediation of global cities in an era of shifting power dynamics.

2. Literature Review

Hong Kong has long been an essential gateway between China and the rest of the world. It is a key player in many aspects, such as global finance, trade, and culture. As one of the world's leading financial centers, it facilitates international fundraising and initial public offerings (IPOs) for companies at home and abroad. It is also a global trading hub and a crucial point in the supply chains of many industries. Having been a former British colony, Hong Kong maintains a distinctive blend of Western and Eastern culture with thriving film, art, and entertainment industries that have influenced global perceptions of Chinese culture. Consequently, research on the construction of Hong Kong's image holds significant importance. The following is a review of a Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis on the construction of city images.

The importance of image is universally recognized. Image is typically defined as the set of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person holds about a brand (Kotler, 2001). Within the realm of image research, city image is particularly salient. The concept of "city image" originated from American urban planner Kevin Lynch, who identified elements such as roads, landmarks, districts, and edges as components of a city's image, emphasizing the importance of spatial construction in shaping urban identity. Broadly speaking, city image represents individuals' collective impression of a city, shaped by their emotions, perceptions, visual cues and other sensory stimuli (Crompton, 1979). From a more sophisticated perspective, the city's image is expressed through a variety of elements, including its attractions, transit system, architecture, and more. Additionally, city images can be deconstructed into distinct dimensions, each offering a unique measurement perspective (Roxas et al., 2020). This multifaceted approach provides a deeper and more nuanced insight into the intricate dynamics that shape and influence the perception of a city's identity.

Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis (CB-CDA) is an effective methodological approach for studying city image based on the following points. Firstly, Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis allows researchers to systematically analyze the frequency of particular words and phrases related to a city to find recurrent themes and characteristics connected to the city image. This quantitative analysis of linguistic usage establishes a rigorous foundation for unraveling how public discourse shapes and solidifies specific perceptions of a city. Secondly, critical discourse analysis focuses on the power relations and ideologies embedded in language. It examines how dominant groups—such as governments, businesses, and media outlets—shape public

perceptions of cities through their discursive practices. CB-CDA reveals how these portrayals may perpetuate certain ideologies and, in turn, disadvantage particular communities. By exposing these dynamics, CB-CDA offers a critical lens through which to understand the social and political implications of city image construction.

Several studies have explored city image through various approaches. For instance, one study conducts research on the city image of Panam City based on data collected from walls and structures. This study not only provides valuable insights into the city's heritage but also encourages innovative methods of digital preservation, thereby enhancing the understanding and appreciation of Panam City's historical significance. Another study models the city's image of Granada by means of a semi-structured questionnaire. According to the obtained model, the findings reveal that several factors significantly influence the local residents' perception of their city, including the city's architectural and urban appeal, heritage preservation, pollution issues, environmental commitment and respect by individuals and businesses, social issues, the city's commercial and tourism offerings, the potential of the University of Granada, and the residents' self-perception.

However, despite the abundance of research on city image, relatively few studies have employed CB-CDA as a methodological approach.

To the best of our knowledge, one notable exception is a study that conducts a Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis on Harbin's image in Chinese and Western media quantitatively and qualitatively. The study finds that (1) both media primarily portray Harbin as "the city of ice and snow"; (2) domestic media focus more on promoting tourism to boost economic growth, while foreign media exhibit a more diverse and comprehensive coverage; (3) both media types have limitations that need to be addressed.

Generally, the extant literature predominantly employs content analysis as the methodological approach, with corpus-based critical discourse analysis (CB-CDA) being underutilized. Additionally, the application of CB-CDA has predominantly been confined to cities other than Hong Kong. Furthermore, some studies draw upon theoretical frameworks from sociology or

journalism, which may not fully capture the unique nuances of city image construction in the context of Hong Kong. Building on the identified gaps in the literature, this study seeks to address them by utilizing CB-CDA to analyze Hong Kong's city image as represented in the news coverage of *China Daily*. This methodological framework aims to yield a more sophisticated and nuanced comprehension of the construction and dissemination of Hong Kong's image through media discourse, offering significant contributions to the advancement of city image research.

3. The Synergy of Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics

The synergy between Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics (CL) is of paramount importance. The following sections will provide a concise overview of the theoretical frameworks underpinning this study, focusing on both CDA and CL.

Numerous prominent theorists have contributed to CDA, widely recognized as a framework for examining the connection between language use and its social context. It specifically examines how "authority, dominance, and social inequality are constructed, sustained, reproduced and resisted in the discourse or written and spoken words" (Amoussou & Allagbe 2018, p. 13). This approach concentrates on analyzing social issues and the interactions between discourse and other social components, such as power relations, ideologies, institutions, and social identities. Historically, critical language research has been primarily concerned with ideology and power. Van Dijk, for example, argued that the foundation of CDA was the study of ideology since "people acquire, express and reproduce their ideologies by text or talk" (Abdulzahra & Almehmdawi 2018, p. 274). Fairclough (2010) further suggests that ideology can extend to power battles in society, where several ideologies compete for supremacy. According to Zhang (2014), language creates a "constructed" reality and represents a world as perceived by the ideological needs of special groups. From this vantage point, CDA is fundamentally a socially oriented approach to discourse analysis. Generally speaking, most CDA models share three major themes: "the concept of power," "the concept of history," and "the concept of ideology" (Hossain 2022, p. 439). In other words, CDA provides a useful opportunity to uncover hidden realities,

including power, ideology, persuasive strategies, and linguistic devices.

CL is the study of natural language through real-world language usage using a corpus—a sizable collection of texts that are representative of a specific variety of languages and in a machine-readable format (McEnery & Wilson, 2001). A corpus offers enough databases of naturally occurring discourse to allow for empirical evaluations of authentic language usage patterns, according to Biber et al. (1994). When paired with computational tools, the corpus-based approach enables analyses of a scope that would not be possible otherwise. According to McEnery and Gabrielatos (2006), the corpus-based approach places more emphasis on quantitative data, such as frequency counts and statistical measurements, which allow for research replication and confirm the statistical validity of analytical conclusions. These advantages highlight how the corpus-based approach leverages real-world language data, performs quantitative analysis, and provides reliable linguistic evidence to identify compelling and recurring linguistic patterns.

However, both CL and CDA have limitations that can be addressed through their integration. One primary criticism of the corpus-based approach is its failure to account for the contextual elements of the text. Corpus data is often isolated from the communicative environment in which it was generated, leaving the background entirely behind, as noted by Widdowson (1998). Conversely, CDA is frequently criticized for its lack of representativeness due to its reliance on small-scale data. According to Stubbs (1997), the carefully selected text samples in CDA studies are insufficiently representative. Therefore, a small-scale CDA investigation can overlook infrequent patterns that indicate minority discourses and fail to detect frequent language patterns that represent powerful discourses (Baker et al., 2008).

Integrating CL and CDA enables researchers to capitalize on their advantages while mitigating their limitations, creating a more solid methodological framework to address issues concerning the discursive representation of social injustices and identify new topics of public discourse for a more methodical examination (Nartey & Mwinlaaru, 2019). CL processes and methodologies can quantify discourse phenomena already identified by CDA, while corpus-based CDA can systematically validate analytical results by providing empirical support.

This study aims to reveal a deeper understanding of how Hong Kong's image is constructed and disseminated through media discourse. By leveraging the synergistic methodological approach of CL and CDA, this study has the potential to advance the field of city image studies.

4. Data and Methodology

This study intends to answer two specific questions: (1) What thematic elements are prevalent in the news coverage of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) in *China Daily*? (2) In what social and political contexts is Hong Kong's city image constructed within the news coverage of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) in *China Daily*?

The first stage was to create the research corpus using the search phrase Hong Kong to retrieve relevant news articles from the database Factiva. The time frame for the data is between April 24, 2023 and December 7, 2024, based on the following considerations. Firstly, *Guidelines for Promoting the Development of Standards* in the GBA were released on April 24, 2023, marking a milestone in regional integration, emphasizing Hong Kong's alignment with mainland China and Macao in building a world-class bay area. Meanwhile, December 7, 2024 was selected as the endpoint to capture the most recent data available. After manually removing extraneous metadata (e.g., publication dates, bylines, copyright notices), the Hong Kong Corpus of *China Daily* (HKCCD) was obtained, incorporating 35 articles and 27070 tokens. The GBA was selected for extended analysis due to its prominence in *China Daily*'s coverage and its status as one of China's most dynamic regions.

The second stage was to generate a summary of the corpus and to check whether Hong Kong is represented as a keyword in the corpus. By comparing it with the BNC2014 Baby+, a generic corpus in Antconc3.5.9w containing 5,024,072 tokens, a keyword list was produced. #AntConc, a free corpus retrieval tool, was created by Professor Laurence Anthony of Waseda University in Japan to support data-driven learning and corpus linguistics research.

Keywords are words that have a statistically

higher relative frequency of occurrence in one corpus than in another (Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery, 2013, 72). Three strategies were implemented to ensure their distinctiveness in extracting keywords of the HKCCD: keyness, relative frequency, and contextual diversity (Subtirelu & Baker 2018, 113). Calculating keyness value can be validated through the following procedures: construct a target corpus and a reference corpus and set frequency and coverage thresholds, such as at least 100 occurrences per million words and coverage of no less than 20%. Utilize programs such as AntConc to determine the keyness values, then filter terms with a significance level of p < 0.001 (Log-Likelihood > 10.83) using Log-Likelihood or other statistical techniques. Display the keyness, frequency, and coverage numbers in a table and explain the distribution and importance of the keywords in light of the study's goals.

To answer the first question, the third step was to create a Hong Kong collocation network and examine its respective constructions. Collocation network can demonstrate the linguistic construction of specific concepts or topics.

Brezina, McEnery, and Wattam (2015) contend that rather than being studied separately, collocates should be considered as a component of more extensive collocation networks that are accessible and observable with #AntConc once the collocation parameters notation (CPN) is set. Hong Kong was subjected to further collocation and concordance analyses.

To answer the second question, the study analyzes the context, collocation networks, and content of the relevant reports in detail, seeking to reveal how Hong Kong's city image is constructed in social contexts, such as economic and cultural interactions, and political contexts, including the "One Country, Two Systems" framework and policy initiatives. The study aims to illuminate how *China Daily* shapes Hong Kong's city image and provide new perspectives on Hong Kong's positioning within the GBA's development.

Figure 1 presents a critical discourse analysis framework that emphasizes thematic aspects, keyword identification, collocation networks, and macro-contextual analyses to analyze Hong Kong's city image building in *China Daily*'s GBA coverage.
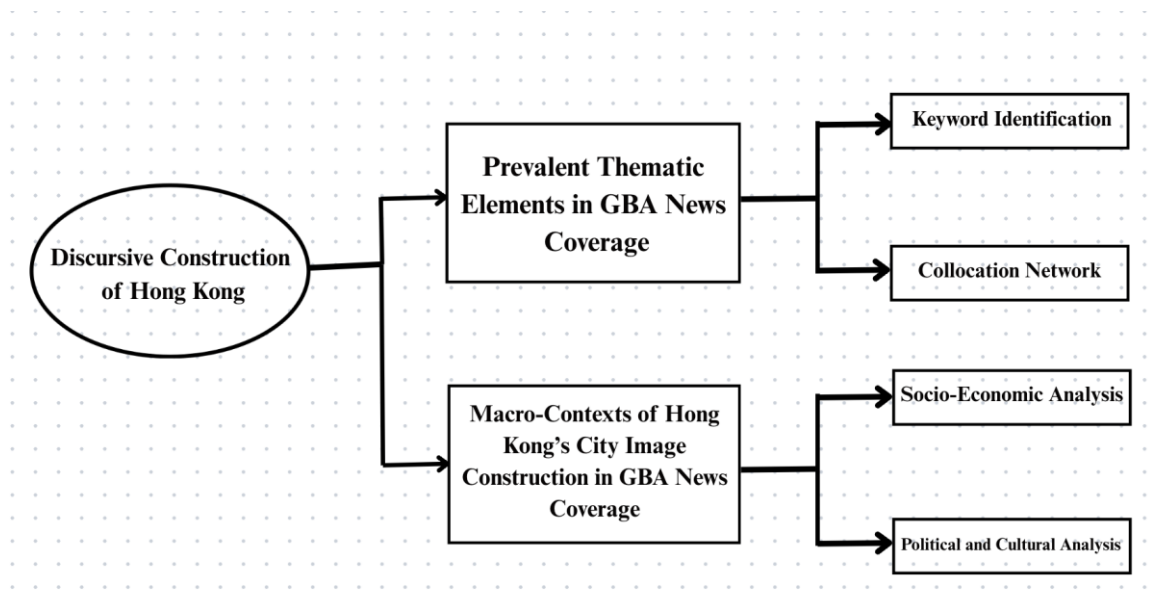

Figure 1.

5. Results and Findings

5.1 Keyword Analysis

This study employs corpus-based critical discourse analysis (CB-CDA) to investigate the construction of Hong Kong's city image within *China Daily*'s coverage of the Greater Bay Area

(GBA). Utilizing AntConc for keyword extraction and collocational analysis, five statistically salient thematic categories emerged from the corpus: Economic Hub, Governance and Administration, International Connectivity, Regional Cooperation, and Innovation Ecosystem. These themes, derived through

corpus-driven methods, reflect lexical and semantic patterns that collectively shape Hong Kong's discursive representation. Below, we explicate these findings with attention to corpus linguistic principles, including keyword keyness, collocational networks, and semantic prosody, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Top 50 Lexical Keywords in the Corpus

Rank	Keyword	Relative frequency in HKCCD	Relative frequency in BNC2014 Baby+	Keyness (Likelihood)	Keyness (Effect)
1	Hong Kong	494	0	2501.334	0.039
2	GBA	215	0	1086.408	0.017
3	Guangdong	119	0	600.892	0.009
4	Macao	109	0	550.356	0.009
5	Mainland	112	5	525.039	0.009
6	Innovation	93	1	458.606	0.007
7	Bay	101	8	454.078	0.008
8	Development	132	69	419.524	0.010
9	Cooperation	77	0	388.693	0.006
10	China	92	24	350.187	0.007
11	Shenzhen	64	0	323.039	0.005
12	Global	75	10	318.684	0.006
13	Said	143	172	316.826	0.011
14	Region	85	37	285.550	0.007
15	Chinese	64	13	255.288	0.005
16	Greater	84	52	251.788	0.007
17	Area	109	133	239.422	0.009
18	Administrative	50	2	235.728	0.004
19	Cities	76	43	235.119	0.006
20	Financial	73	43	222.703	0.006
21	Opportunities	52	11	205.931	0.004
22	Talent	46	4	204.945	0.004
23	SAR	40	0	201.864	0.003
24	Yuan	39	0	196.816	0.003
25	Government	68	56	181.847	0.005
26	International	64	58	163.887	0.005
27	Province	34	1	162.662	0.003
28	Economic	64	61	160.006	0.005
29	Technology	71	85	157.571	0.006
30	Enterprises	35	3	156.135	0.003
31	Center	30	0	151.387	0.002
32	Ho	30	0	151.387	0.002
33	Cross	45	20	150.204	0.004
34	Promote	32	2	146.603	0.003
35	Hub	29	0	146.340	0.002

36	Logistics	29	0	146.340	0.002
37	City	75	112	145.413	0.006
38	BRI	28	0	141.292	0.002
39	Guangzhou	28	0	141.292	0.002
40	Percent	39	15	135.511	0.003
41	And	1009	7734	134.535	0.060
42	Billion	30	3	131.782	0.002
43	Integration	35	10	130.622	0.003
44	Projects	34	9	128.960	0.003
45	Technological	32	7	125.943	0.003
46	Growth	37	18	120.182	0.003
47	Border	37	19	118.152	0.003
48	Green	43	36	114.126	0.003
49	Collaboration	24	1	112.874	0.002
50	Plan	35	18	111.709	0.003

5.1.1 Economic Hub: Anchoring Global and Regional Financial Networks

The prominence of keywords such as "Financial," "Opportunities," "Yuan," and "Economic" underscores Hong Kong's depiction as a preeminent global financial center. Positioned at the intersection of international markets and the GBA's economic corridor, Hong Kong serves as a critical conduit for foreign and domestic capital, particularly in technology, finance, and real estate sectors. Its strategic linkages with Shenzhen and Guangzhou amplify its role in bolstering China's technological and economic ascendancy. Notably, Hong Kong's leadership in offshore yuan trading and yuan-denominated financial products aligns with China's broader agenda to internationalize its currency. This dual function—bridging mainland markets with global financial systems—cements Hong Kong's indispensability to both regional development and international economic integration.

5.1.2 Governance and Administration: Balancing Autonomy and Integration

Keywords "Government," "Administrative," and "SAR" highlight Hong Kong's unique governance model under the "one country, two systems" framework. As a Special Administrative Region (SAR), Hong Kong maintains a distinct juridical system and administrative autonomy while contributing to national agendas such as the GBA initiative. This governance structure enables the city to preserve its institutional identity—a cornerstone of its appeal to international investors—while synchronizing policies with mainland counterparts to foster regional cohesion. The SAR government's role in navigating this equilibrium ensures Hong Kong remains a stable, legally predictable hub for global commerce.

5.1.3 International Connectivity: Bridging Global Networks

Hong Kong's identity as a global metropolis is reinforced by keywords like "integration," "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)," "Global," and "cross-border." Its integration into the BRI positions it as a linchpin in China's infrastructure and trade networks, leveraging its cosmopolitan demographics, multilingual workforce, and logistical infrastructure. The city's "cross-border" economic dynamics—facilitating seamless flows of capital, talent, and goods between mainland China and global markets—exemplify its role as a transnational intermediary. This duality of local specificity and global integration is central to its portrayal as a node of international exchange.

5.1.4 Regional Cooperation: Synergizing the Greater Bay Area

Hong Kong's collaborative role within the GBA is emphasized through narratives of cross-border partnership. With a collective GDP exceeding $1.6 trillion, the GBA harnesses Hong

Kong's financial expertise, Macao's tourism prominence, and Guangdong's manufacturing prowess. Keywords such as "Cooperation" and contextual references to joint ventures in finance, technology, and sustainable development illustrate Hong Kong's function as a unifier, driving regional innovation while mitigating administrative and regulatory barriers. This cooperative paradigm amplifies the GBA's competitiveness on the global stage.

5.1.5 Innovation Ecosystem: Cultivating Talent and Technology

The keywords "innovation," "technology," "enterprises," "development," and "talent" delineate Hong Kong's emergence as an innovation powerhouse. Positioned at the forefront of China's technological strategy, the city attracts global talent through initiatives in fintech, biotechnology, and green energy. Its robust academic institutions, venture capital networks, and policy incentives for startups underscore its capacity to translate research into market-driven solutions. By fostering synergies between mainland industries and international R&D trends, Hong Kong solidifies its role as a crucible of next-generation innovation.

5.2 Collocation and Concordance Analysis

5.2.1 Collocation Patterns: Reinforcing Hong Kong's Multidimensional Identity

The collocation analysis of node words within the *China Daily* corpus elucidates Hong Kong's discursive positioning in relation to the Greater Bay Area (GBA). High frequency collocates such as "Macao" and "Guangdong" underscore the tripartite synergy among these regions, emphasizing Hong Kong's role as a collaborative anchor within the GBA framework. Terms like "greater," "administrative," and "special" accentuate Hong Kong's dual identity as both a distinctive SAR and an integrated contributor to national strategies. Additionally, collocates such as "university" and "polytechnic" foreground the centrality of academic institutions in shaping Hong Kong's socio-economic and intellectual profile, reflecting its interconnectedness with neighboring regions through educational, political, and geographic ties.

5.2.2 Concordance Analysis of "University": Academic Collaboration and Global Prestige

A close examination of concordance lines for "university" reveals four discursive strands that construct Hong Kong's image as a hub of academic excellence and cross-regional cooperation:

Hong Kong's universities are spearheading cross-border academic integration cross-border academic integration through strategic establishment of satellite campuses across the GBA. The recurrent mention of institutions such as "City University of Hong Kong (Dongguan)," "University of Hong Kong (Shenzhen)," and "Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Foshan)" highlights the city's proactive engagement in establishing satellite campuses across the GBA. This institutional expansion signifies Hong Kong's strategic role in harmonizing educational resources, fostering interdisciplinary research, and cultivating a unified talent pool for regional innovation. Such partnerships exemplify the city's function as a catalyst for academic integration, bridging pedagogical methodologies between Hong Kong and mainland China.

Hong Kong's higher education institutions assert global academic prestige through their consistent recognition in international university rankings. References to global rankings—such as the "University of Hong Kong at 67th place" and the "Chinese University of Hong Kong at 83rd"—position Hong Kong as a leader in global higher education. These accolades underscore the international competitiveness of its universities, particularly in research output and academic innovation. By emphasizing this recognition, *China Daily* reinforces Hong Kong's credibility as a knowledge economy cornerstone, aligning its scholarly achievements with China's broader ambitions to ascend global innovation indices.

The symbolic relationship between academia and industry positions Hong Kong as nexus for talent development and interdisciplinary innovation. Case studies, such as the collaboration between Stan Ho Ho-ming (academic dean at the University of Hong Kong) and GBA cities in green finance, illustrate Hong Kong's capacity to merge academic expertise with industrial demands. The city's education system is framed as a dynamic ecosystem that attracts global talent, offering flexible curricula and interdisciplinary programs in emerging fields like sustainability, fintech, and business analytics. This narrative positions Hong Kong as an incubator for professionals capable of driving forward both regional development and global trends.

Hong Kong's universities facilitate career pathways that enhance regional mobility and socio-economic integration within the GBA. Examples like "Yip," a graduate of Hong Kong Polytechnic University working in Guangzhou, demonstrate the city's role as a gateway to GBA career opportunities. The discourse emphasizes seamless labor mobility, youth employability, and cross-border professional networks, framing Hong Kong's graduates as key actors in the GBA's socio-economic integration. This aligns with broader narratives of Hong Kong as a conduit for talent circulation, linking local education outcomes to regional economic vitality.

5.3 Synthesis: Constructing a Cohesive Regional and Global Image

The collocation and concordance analyses collectively portray Hong Kong as a multifaceted nexus within *China Daily*'s GBA discourse. The city is depicted as: (1) a collaborative academic hub, leveraging cross-border university partnerships to unify regional educational standards; (2) a globally competitive intellectual center, validated by international rankings and research excellence; (3) a talent incubator, bridging academic training with industrial innovation and green development agendas; (4) a career springboard, facilitating youth mobility across the GBA's integrated labor market.

These narratives consistently align with the themes identified in the keyword analysis (e.g., "Innovation," "Cooperation," "International"), reinforcing Hong Kong's dual identity as both a regional unifier and a global intermediary. *China Daily* strategically emphasizes cross-border synergies, talent fluidity, and institutional prestige to frame Hong Kong as indispensable to China's geopolitical vision—a city that harmonizes its own historical global stature with China's contemporary national priorities.

6. Discussion: Socio-Political Underpinnings of Hong Kong's Image Construction

The discursive portrayal of Hong Kong in *China Daily*'s GBA coverage—emphasizing its roles as an economic hub, administrative entity, international intermediary, cooperative partner, and innovation engine—is inextricably tied to broader socio-political dynamics. These include regional integration agendas, historical legacies, governance narratives, and China's geopolitical strategies. This section contextualizes the identified themes within their socio-political frameworks to elucidate why Hong Kong is represented through this multifaceted lens.

6.1 Economic Centrality: Regional Synergy and Institutional Legacies

Hong Kong's depiction as an economic center derives from its dual function as a "super-connector" and "value-added mediator" within the GBA. This role is anchored in three socio-political factors.

GBA's complementary economic model plays a vital role. The "front-end research, back-end production" framework—where Hong Kong leads in financial services while mainland cities like Shenzhen drive technological R&D—reflects China's strategy to leverage comparative regional advantages. This symbiotic relationship amplifies the GBA's global competitiveness, positioning Hong Kong as a gateway for international capital (e.g., offshore RMB trading) while mainland hubs industrialize innovations.

Institutional trust contributes to Hong Kong's global positioning. Specifically, its common-law system, intellectual property protections, and financial regulatory standards—vestiges of its colonial history—remain pivotal in attracting foreign investment. These institutional strengths are strategically preserved under the "one country, two systems" (OCTS) principle, enabling Hong Kong to serve as a globally recognized interface for China's economic liberalization.

6.2 Cooperation and Innovation: Talent Mobility and Policy-Driven Integration

The emphasis on cross-border collaboration and innovation reflects China's broader agenda to harmonize the GBA into a cohesive socio-economic entity. Hong Kong's city image as cooperative and innovative is deeply tied to the cross-border talent mobility, educational collaboration and social integration.

Collaboration and creation are deeply rooted in youth employment schemes and talented circulation. Policies such as the Greater Bay Area Youth Employment Scheme institutionalize talent mobility, fostering a shared regional identity among younger generations. By encouraging Hong Kong graduates to work in mainland cities (e.g., Yip's transition to Guangzhou), these initiatives mitigate cultural and institutional disparities, aligning with the central government's vision of "social

integration through economic participation."

Another central element of Hong Kong's cooperative role is the academic expansion as soft power. The establishment of Hong Kong university campuses in Dongguan, Shenzhen, and Foshan transcends educational collaboration; it serves as a mechanism to disseminate pedagogical norms and cultural values across the GBA. This soft-power strategy not only enhances regional innovation capacity but also subtly integrates Hong Kong's academic institutions into national development narratives.

The employment opportunity is also worth mentioning. The skyrocketing number of Hong Kong graduates choosing to pursue employment opportunities in cities like Guangzhou reflects the evolving discourse on cross-border talent flow within the GBA. This phenomenon contributes to the "Two Systems" differences by offering professionals the opportunity to bridge the gap between Hong Kong's international approach and mainland China's rapidly developing economy. The synergy enhances both regions' competitiveness, creating a constant flow of ideas, skills, and opportunities that contribute to the region's overall innovative capacity.

6.3 International Identity: Historical Legacies and Geopolitical Re-Branding

Hong Kong's city image is shaped by a tension between its colonial past and its recalibrated role under China's geopolitical ambitions.

Hong Kong's representation should be interpreted on the basis of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as recontextualization. Historically framed as a "gateway to Asia," Hong Kong's colonial-era infrastructure and global networks are repurposed under the BRI to advance China's transcontinental trade and investment goals. *China Daily* discursively transforms Hong Kong's historical ties with the West from a legacy of foreign influence into an asset for China's contemporary global outreach.

The juxtaposition of the image of international finance hub with the "patriot governance" discourse reflects a strategic balancing act. While the city's global connectivity is celebrated, its governance is framed as inseparable from national loyalty, ensuring its internationalism operates within the boundaries of Chinese sovereignty. This narrative reconciles Hong Kong's global identity with the Communist

Party's emphasis on political conformity, mitigating perceptions of ideological dissonance.

6.4 Administrative Framing: Depoliticization and Institutional Harmonization

The portrayal of Hong Kong as an efficient administrative region within the GBA aligns with China's efforts to depoliticize its governance challenges.

While the "One Country, Two Systems" (OCTS) principle originally emphasized Hong Kong's autonomy, the GBA initiative subtly recalibrates this framework by prioritizing institutional harmonization. Infrastructure projects (e.g., Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge), regulatory alignments, and shared market protocols reduce systemic disparities, fostering a de facto integration that complements—rather than contests—centralized governance.

Moreover, the administrative framing of Hong Kong also contributes to the broader objective of portraying the city's governance as pragmatic and efficient, rather than politically charged. By foregrounding administrative efficiency (e.g., streamlined customs procedures, cross-border legal arbitration), *China Daily* shifts focus away from political tensions (e.g., 2019 protests) toward Hong Kong's functional contributions to national development. This depoliticized framing reinforces the perception of Hong Kong as a "problem-solving partner" within the GBA, aligning with Beijing's preference for technocratic governance over democratic deliberation.

7. Conclusion

This study employed CB-CDA to examine how Hong Kong's city image is constructed within *China Daily*'s coverage of the GBA. The findings reveal five dominant representations: Economic Hub, Governance and Administration, International Connectivity, Regional Cooperation, and Innovation Ecosystem. The reason behind the image construction lies in Hong Kong's role as a "super-connector" which highlights Hong Kong's financial leadership, talent mobility, and academic expansion. A pragmatic governance narrative reinforces administrative efficiency and depoliticization, positioning Hong Kong as both a globalized city and a key player in China's national development agenda. There are various ramifications for the study's conclusions. The information can be used by policymakers to

improve Hong Kong's participation in international governance and economic integration. Businesses can find investment opportunities in industries like finance, technology, and regional development by analyzing how Hong Kong is portrayed in the media. Cultural organizations and educators can also use these insights to help them navigate Hong Kong's changing identity in a rapidly changing geopolitical environment. Additionally, the study adds to broader theoretical debates about media discourse, urban branding, and the sociopolitical mediation of global cities. Despite these contributions, the study has limitations. Its exclusive reliance on *China Daily*—a state-affiliated outlet—may foreground narratives aligned with national policy, potentially marginalizing alternative perspectives from independent Hong Kong or international media. Furthermore, while the corpus-based approach offers quantitative rigor, it does not account for audience interpretation of these narratives. Future studies could address these gaps by integrating cross-media comparisons to capture discursive diversity, as well as qualitative methods such as sentiment analysis or audience interviews to explore reception and perception. Such multidisciplinary approaches would deepen the understanding of how media constructions interact with public discourse, ultimately offering a more nuanced portrayal of Hong Kong's positioning within the GBA and global arenas.

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