


Political resistance in *Sheep Village*: The politics of metaphors and their pedagogical implications

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a critical discourse analysis of the *Sheep Village* children's trilogy and examines its pedagogical potential for the language education of Hong Kong children living in exile. Drawing on metaphor analysis, the study analyzes how recurring figures such as the sheep, wolves, shepherd, and village allegorically represent collective agency, totalitarian power, moral leadership, and communal belonging in the context of the 2019 Hong Kong protests. The findings show that the texts construct resistance not through individual heroism but through ethical awareness, shared responsibility, and the preservation of cultural memory, offering young readers a narrative framework for understanding injustice and political power. Building on these findings, the article proposes pedagogical principles adapted from Critical English for Academic Purposes (CEAP) to support the integration of literary texts into language education. It argues that metaphor-rich narratives such as *Sheep Village* can be used to develop linguistic competence, emotional literacy, and critical civic awareness among children in exile communities, positioning children's literature as a bridge between language learning, identity formation, and sociopolitical consciousness in host societies.



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1. Introduction

Throughout the second half of 2019, Hong Kong experienced a series of mass protests. The demonstrations were triggered by an amendment Bill that the Hong Kong government, under the then Chief Executive Carrie Lam, attempted to legislate. The legislation, if enacted, would have returned fugitives to jurisdictions that did not already have an extradition agreement with Hong Kong. They included mainland China, which had a different legal system to the common law system in Hong Kong. The Bill was eventually withdrawn due to mass public resistance, and China imposed a National Security Law in Hong Kong instead. In response to the security law's imposition, many Hongkongers have fled their homeland. The exodus has largely been facilitated by the United Kingdom, which has opened the door to repatriate 5.4 million Hongkongers through the British National (Overseas) (BN(O)) scheme (BBC, 2021). BN(O) status is a form of British nationality connected to residency in the British dependent territory of Hong Kong. This territory is now under political repression by the Chinese government, which has failed to govern Hong Kong according to the Sino-British Joint Declaration following the 1997 transfer of sovereignty. Following this failure, the repatriation facilitated by the British government represents an emerging kind of recolonization by returning British colonial subjects to the metropole over time. Australia and Canada have also offered lifeboats to Hongkongers escaping the totalitarian party-state's incursion into Hong Kong.

Sheep Village is a trilogy of illustrated children's books depicting sociopolitical events in Hong Kong. The original trilogy was produced by the Executive Council members of the now defunct General Union of Speech Therapists in Hong Kong. Since the imposition of the National Security Law, civil society groups have largely disbanded (Hong Kong Free Press, 2022). Although the original authors of the trilogy have been convicted on charges of sedition, a group of exiled Hong Kong educators in the United Kingdom have translated the books into English and Mandarin and produced an additional three books to complement the trilogy. The texts have been effectively banned in Hong Kong, likely because it presents events of the 2019 protests in a way that challenges the sanctioned account and exposes children to the truth of political repression and resistance. Existing scholarship on the 2019 Hong Kong protests has focused primarily on adult political discourse and activist media. Far less attention has been paid to how the movement is allegorically rearticulated for children, particularly in forms that circulate under censorship and within exile communities. By exploring how the metaphors convey power, resistance, and identity, this study shows how these texts can be used to develop children's critical language awareness, cultural knowledge, and reflective literacy skills in exile contexts.

The purpose of this study is twofold. First, drawing on critical discourse analysis (CDA), it examines the allegorical metaphors and power relations embedded in the trilogy. Second, it investigates the pedagogical implications of the texts for Hongkongers-in-exile by adapting principles from Critical English for Academic Purposes (CEAP) to a play-based critical literacy approach suitable for young learners. This study is situated within the broader context of increasing constraints on civil society and the transnational repression experienced by Hong Kong's exile communities, which have heightened the need for accessible critical literacy resources for displaced families.

Although the trilogy is no longer publicly distributed and the English translation website has since been taken offline, its disappearance is itself central to the book's scholarly relevance. In repressive political contexts, cultural materials often circulate only briefly before being censored, erased, or withdrawn. The removal of the trilogy from local and international platforms exemplifies how the National Security Law reshapes the production, transmission, and survival of children's literature in Hong Kong. Its suppression provides critical insight into state anxieties, the shrinking of civil society, and the transformation of cultural memory under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s totalitarian pressure. Banned cultural artefacts often acquire heightened analytical value precisely because the state attempts to erase them. The trilogy's criminalization transformed a small-scale children's publication into a symbolic site of ideological conflict, making it a rich text for understanding state-society relations and the pedagogical framing of resistance.

1.1 Sociopolitical Context

The 2019 protests were the pivotal point in Hong Kong's mass resistance to the encroachments of the totalitarian party-state into Hong Kong's affairs. However, they were not an isolated event. There had been a long history of public dissatisfaction with the Hong Kong government's failure to defend the city's interests against China. The government's 2003 attempt to impose a security legislation failed due to mass public resistance. In 2012, the Moral and National Education curriculum was withdrawn as a result of student protests. Following the 2014 Umbrella movement, Hong Kong's Legislative Council rejected the Beijing-imposed model of universal suffrage elections. In 2019, the extradition Bill was withdrawn following mass protests. Following the imposition of the National Security Law, resistance to totalitarian repression in Hong Kong continues through the Hong Kong diaspora worldwide.

These sociopolitical events inspired the production of *Sheep Village*. The trilogy is a political allegory that tells a story about a group of anthropomorphic sheep who fights against the wolves invading their village after the departure of their shepherd. It echoes the themes of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Just as the animals in *Animal Farm* are ultimately betrayed and they eventually live under the dictatorship of Napoleon, the shepherd's departure leaves the sheep without protection that opens the way for Chairman Wolf to seize power. The original series contained three books: *The Guardians of Sheep Village*; *The Twelve Warriors of Sheep Village*; and *The Street Cleaners of Sheep Village*. The additional books created by the exiled teachers were titled: *The Architect of Sheep Village*; *Voting Day in Sheep Village*; and *Sheep Village Daily*. *The Guardians of Sheep Village* serves as an allegorical representation of Hong Kong's overall situation, whereas the other five books focus on specific events related to the 2019 protests.

Sheep Village helps to humanize abstract political ideas, provides insights into the lived experiences of Hongkongers, and explores the hegemonic struggles for a Hong Kong nation. These are achieved through historical narratives that no other narrative fiction has presented. *Sheep Village* is a worthy

resource because it serves as a valuable lens into Hongkongers' perspectives. Although it is a piece of narrative fiction, it provides insights into the sentiments, fears, hopes, and resistance of its authors and intended readers, reflecting on the wider ideological discourses within the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong. In short, the trilogy is a unique source representing the Hong Kong experience in narrative fiction that provides a comprehensive portrayal of that experience in depth and detail.

1.2. Brief Review of Literature

Metaphors related to Hong Kong's politics have been a topic of interest in applied linguistics research. In the early years following the handover, a study found English majors' students used family metaphors to describe their emotions about the change of sovereignty (Jackson, 2002). Within the branch of pragmatics, John Flowerdew has been a prominent contributor to the study of Hong Kong political discourses. His major works include discourse analysis of political speeches delivered by Hong Kong's last governor Chris Patten in the creation of four bedrock principles of Hong Kong (Flowerdew, 1997; 2016), the discursive construction of a Chinese identity in the post-handover era by Hong Kong's first Chief Executive Tung Chee-hwa (Flowerdew, 2004), and the metaphoric construction of patriotism under the Chinese regime (Flowerdew & Leong, 2007). Flowerdew's (2011) volume, *Critical Discourse Analysis in Historiography: The Case of Hong Kong's Evolving Political Identity*, encapsulates the evolving political discourses from the colonial administration to the Special Administrative Region government. In his later work, Flowerdew (2017) finds metaphors of war and conflict in understanding the Occupy movement. In addition, Ng (2020) analyzes how Beijing's voice has been represented in different ways by Chief Executive C. Y. Leung and the opposition camp. J. Wang (2017)'s study examines the discursive construction of Hong Kong's identity through twenty-two policy addresses by the colonial and Special Administrative Region governments. K. H. Wong (2024)'s study finds Chief Executive Carrie Lam used a mother-child metaphor to describe her relationship with Hongkongers, later escalating the city's internal conflict into a national sovereignty and security issue.

This study explores the pedagogical implications of teaching *Sheep Village* through the critical lens of Critical English for Academic Purposes (CEAP). While the trilogy is not an academic text, this study draws on CEAP's critical orientation to inform a child-appropriate literacy approach. CEAP highlights how discourses operate within broader structures of power, and how raising language awareness enables learners to recognize, question, and construct alternative discourses (Chun, 2015). In Benesch's (1996) seminal work, CEAP's political applicability is evident in asking students to respond to tuition cuts by composing texts that articulate their concerns. On a global scale, Fenton-Smith (2014) shows how CEAP can help learners analyze and challenge dominant representations in international media and political events. Recent CEAP-informed studies have examined Hong Kong texts of resistance, such as the protest anthem "Glory to Hong Kong" and the slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times", as examples of competing discourses that diverge from official state narratives and express alternative understandings of identity and sovereignty (K. H. Wong 2025a; 2025b). These works demonstrate how issues of inequality, representation, and power can become subjects of critical inquiry, fostering deeper engagement with global sociopolitical issues (Fenton-Smith, 2014).

There is a lack of studies about metaphoric representation of Hong Kong's political identity in children's literature. Similar studies include transition experiences in children's literature and Tibetan children's drawings about their identity (Gu & Catalano, 2022; Phuntsog, 2020). An example of a study of contentious text is *Understanding Animal Farm: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents* (Rodden, 1999). In addition to a literary analysis of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the casebook is supplemented with historical documents that illustrate the meaning of *Animal Farm*. Through the study of the novel, the casebook explores the history of the USSR from historical, political, and literary perspectives. Although *Animal Farm* is a well-known example of animal allegory, it is typically conceived as political satire for adult or adolescent readers, rather than as child-addressed pedagogical narratives. The present study fills the literature void by analyzing metaphors presented in *Sheep Village*, which was produced contemporaneously with the 2019 Hong Kong protests and designed to support children's understanding of social and political events. In doing so, it explores the history of postcolonial Hong Kong, in particular the various protests that culminated in 2019 before the imposition of the National Security Law. The choice of a narrative fiction not only illustrates political repression in Hong Kong but also aligns with the English language education focus of this study.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This research is a documentary study of the children's trilogy *Sheep Village*. Instead of obtaining data from interviews or questionnaires, in documentary studies data are obtained from documents (Grant, 2018). The present study is derived from a larger doctoral project about Hong Kong's political identity. The larger study began as a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) project but completed under the discipline of Communication. Using a critical historiographical approach to critical discourse studies (CDH), the larger project examines how BN(O) status has been transformed from a token of British nationality to a tool of political resistance against China's totalitarian assault on Hong Kong.

2.2. Data Collection

The translated English version of the trilogy and the additional three books produced by the exiled educators were downloaded from links on the now defunct United Kingdom website of *Sheep Village*. The books were downloaded before the website was shut down in early 2025. The absence of ISBN registration, the short-lived public availability, and the removal of translated versions are integral to understanding the text's political life cycle. In this context, the lack of formal distribution is not a limitation but a defining characteristic of cultural production under the National Security Law, and therefore a legitimate and necessary object of scholarly investigation. Interdisciplinary and popular literature, government policies, and relevant news items about the events were collected to support interpretation of the metaphors.

2.3. Data Analysis

Using Flowerdew's (2017) framework of CDH analysis, discursive strategies of foregrounding, presupposition, othering, and framing in the multimodal text were analyzed. Previous studies of Hong Kong's political discourses (Flowerdew, 2004; Flowerdew & Leong, 2007) served as guidance for this present study. While frameworks such as Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) emphasize using historical context to analyze discourse, Flowerdew's CDH was chosen because this study focuses on how *Sheep Village* itself produces historical meaning and political memory through its narratives. Due to word limitations, this article only presents data in the form of quotes from the first book in the series, *The Guardians of Sheep Village*, to elucidate their implicit meanings. However, the metaphoric themes in the findings appear across the series.

The texts were examined using thematic coding guided by Flowerdew's CDH framework. Key metaphors were identified based on their centrality to narrative meaning and their recurrence across the trilogy. Each metaphor was analyzed for its discursive function, including how it represented power relations, identity, and resistance, and how these functions contributed to broader sociopolitical messages.

This study did not incorporate interviews or surveys with children or educators. As a result, the findings are limited to textual and multimodal analysis, and do not capture how actual readers interpret or respond to the metaphors. While this restricts claims about pedagogical effectiveness, the analysis still provides a theoretically grounded understanding of the trilogy's potential for fostering critical literacy and sociopolitical awareness in exile communities.

Although the term "discourse" tends to be interchangeable with the word "language" in the lay contexts, it is considered as having an agenda in critical linguistics (Statham, 2022). According to Statham, ideology influences language that is "part of political and socio-cultural contexts" (p. 9). This study employs elements of multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) to analyze metaphoric texts and images. MCDA refers to semiotic modes such as images and visual aspects of texts that contribute to the overall meaning of the message (Gu & Catalano, 2022; Statham, 2022). According to Unsworth and Cleirigh (2009), images can often elaborate on the text or vice versa or provide further details about the other mode. Metaphors are by no means restricted to the literary and poetry. They are "means of representing one aspect of experience with another" (Fairclough, 2015, p.136).

3. Findings and Discussion

By examining *Sheep Village*, metaphors related Beijing's hegemony over Hong Kong and attempts at assimilating Hong Kong into the Chinese mainland can be found. The metaphors can be categorized into several dominant themes: the shepherd, the sheep, the wolf, and the village. In particular, the wolf

and the sheep together with their variations are a representation of China's hegemonic power over Hong Kong. Metaphorical variations of these themes were found throughout.

3.1. The Shepherd

The analysis begins with the metaphor of the shepherd. Although the metaphoric theme of the shepherd only appears in *The Guardians of Sheep Village*, it symbolizes an important contrast between the freedoms Hongkongers enjoyed under the colonial government and the oppression they now experience under the new regime.

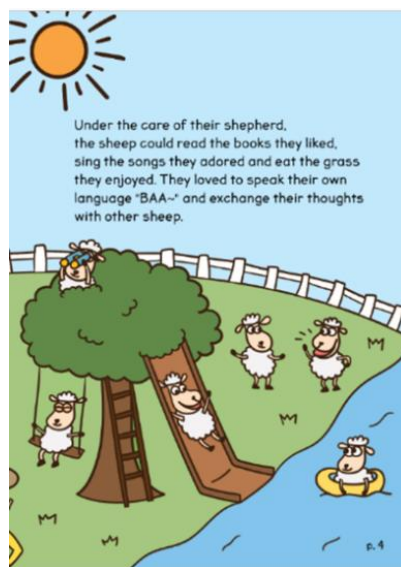


Fig 1. A caring shepherd

The image in [Figure 1](#) provides further details about the text ([Sheep Village 2.0, n.d., p. 4](#)). It shows a caring shepherd on top of a tree looking out with a pair of binoculars, protecting the sheep from the wolves. Framing strategy can be seen. The shepherd is framed as a protective and liberating figure:

Under the care of their shepherd, the sheep could read the books they liked, sing the songs they adored and eat the grass they enjoyed. They loved to speak their own language "BAA~" and exchange their thoughts with other sheep ([Sheep Village 2.0, n.d., p. 4](#)).

The metaphors of the sheep reading books they liked, singing the songs they adored, and eating grass they enjoyed, can be interpreted as a life of freedoms attributing to protection under the shepherd who safeguarded individual freedoms and ensured a state of wellbeing through civil institutions in Hong Kong's society. The metaphor of the shepherd guiding and protecting the sheep indicates parental qualities. The shepherd can be compared to the parent who cares for their children.

The shepherd metaphor is widely used in Christian literature, where Jesus is described as the "good shepherd" guiding and protecting his flock. This longstanding imagery often informs interpretations of authority as paternal and protective. Within this symbolic framework, the shepherd-sheep relationship in the trilogy could be read as representing a father-children dynamic between the colonial governor and Hongkongers.

Drawing on the metaphor, it could be argued that the last colonial governor Chris Patten was a father-shepherd to the people of Hong Kong. The interpretation of a father-children relationship in the shepherd-sheep metaphor is made more plausible because Patten attempted to protect the freedoms and autonomy of the people of Hong Kong by pushing through democratic reforms prior to the 1997 handover ([Carroll, 2007](#); [Tsang, 2004](#)). That the people of Hong Kong affectionately called Patten "Fat Pang" (肥彭) adds weight to this interpretation, evidently because there was a warm feeling towards the father from the children in the relationship in the same way biblical texts depict an affectionate relationship between Jesus and his followers, represented in the dual symbolism. The dominant use of green, blue, and orange indicates a foregrounding strategy that adds to the bright mood and optimism of the image. The green tree comes to the foreground to symbolize prosperity, progress, and protection. The bright blue sky and

sunny day enhance the tone of the image to elevate its brightness. The image thus illustrates the kind of life the Hongkongers lived prior to the handover.

3.2. The Sheep

We now turn to the metaphor of the sheep and its variation *Sheep Village*. The theme is the most dominant and salient metaphoric theme used in the *Sheep Village* trilogy to illustrate China's powerful encroachment on the freedoms of the Hong Kong people. The sheep is an animal that depends on the shepherd's protection. However, delving deeper into the symbolism at play, the sheep is often associated with conformity and the collective over the individual. Thus, the sheep can be symbolic of the people of Hong Kong losing their individuality. This loss of individuality is likened to collective behaviour commonly seen in sheep in a herd. In this sense, the sheep can be seen as a symbol of Hong Kong being pressured by China's homogenizing force to conform to the mainland's social and political norms. The *Sheep Village* trilogy was written against the backdrop of the 2019 Hong Kong protests that led to the imposition of the National Security Law. In the post-National Security Law era, Hongkongers lost their unique identity and freedoms. The transformation from a diverse community to one of a compliant society is thus represented in the metaphor of *Sheep Village*.

Sheep Village can therefore be interpreted as a metaphor representing Hong Kong, which is "protected by fences, so the wolves could not arbitrarily cross over and harm the sheep" (*Sheep Village 2.0, n.d., p. 2*). This can be interpreted as being protected not only by its physical border, but also by the firewall that separated the two legal systems. While the metaphor of the fences is not explicitly identified as the legal firewall, the trilogy's broader allegorical representation of the 2019 Hong Kong protests that led to the imposition of the National Security Law makes this reading gain resonance. The metaphor of the fences can thus be interpreted as a representation of the role of the legal firewall in safeguarding Hong Kong residents from China's jurisdictional overreaches. The Bill under Lam's administration would have returned not only political dissidents to the Chinese mainland, but also businesspeople who have committed white-collar crimes there (Purbrick, 2019). The metaphor of the fences therefore aligns with the anxiety at the heart of the protests. It illustrates Hongkongers' resistance to the Bill and determination to fight against the perceived threats to Hong Kong's autonomy. The fences represent fragility that needs to be constantly maintained.

While the fences metaphor in *Sheep Village* represents protection of the sheep's autonomy and the legal firewall that preserved Hong Kong's civil liberties, this meaning contrasts sharply with the National Security Law's current discourse of protection. The state now frames protection as safeguarding a new constitutional order, positioning the sheep themselves as potential threats to be controlled. This interdiscursive shift transforms the concept of protection from a safeguard for individual freedoms into a tool for state dominance, highlighting the changing power dynamics between Hong Kong residents and Chinese authorities.

The Bill had frightened the sheep, whose shepherd is no longer with them, and they resisted through the prolonged protests:

Then one day, Big Bad Wolf made an urgent announcement: "Sheep Village is about to implement 'Wolf and Sheep Rule' by which the wolves can enter Sheep Village and eat the sheep anytime! Whoever disobeys will be locked up". The sheep were terrified, but because they had no one to lead them, they all gathered together to discuss the situation. Sheep Little Glory suggested, "ever since the shepherd left, our lives have been getting worse by the day. We should try to resist, perhaps Wolf Village will back off" (Sheep Village 2.0, n.d., pp. 13, 15).

Othring is a frequent strategy alongside the metaphor of the sheep. Self is represented by the sheep, presupposed to be the Hongkongers, as indicated by the personal pronouns "our" and "we" in the extract quoting Sheep Little Glory above. The use of these pronouns is an instance of presupposition strategy. It assumes a shared identity among the sheep. The use of such personal pronouns is used to create a sense of group identity that separates the two villages and the sheep from the wolves. The text thus creates a clear divide between the sheep and the wolves. This division is an example of othering strategy. It distinguishes "us" and "them". The use of personal pronouns to emphasize this distinction is not an isolated incident. Throughout the series, there is a constant repetition of such use by the sheep to emphasize the group whose members respond to threats from the wolves in Wolf Village. By highlighting the group identity using the othering strategy, *Sheep Village* is a representation of the tension and opposition between Hong Kong and China. This interpretation is supported in the scholarly literature that finds the Hongkonger identity is set apart from that of China (Flowerdew, 2017; Mathews, 2020).

The Other is presupposed to be the Chinese mainlanders. The phrase “our lives” in the above extract is a “presuppositional trigger” (Flowerdew, 2004, p. 1562). It presupposes that the sheep live in the same home that is being invaded by Wolf Village. The metaphor of the home refers to Hong Kong that has been invaded by the mainlanders over the years. Article 22 of the Basic Law of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR), a constitutional document for the HKSAR, states that the Chinese central authorities can approve mainland persons who can come to HKSAR for residence (Immigration Department of the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China, 2023). This is popularly known as the one-way permit scheme for the purpose of family reunion. Although the quota is set at 150 per day, vetting is at the sole discretion of the central government. The below extracts indicate this policy is aimed at infiltration into Hong Kong by friends of the Chinese regime to make Hong Kong become more like the Chinese mainland:

As time went by, more and more wolves in sheep costumes arrived, and Sheep Village became more and more crowded. The sheep began to speak like wolves, praise Chairman Wolf, and even eat meat (Sheep Village 2.0, n.d., p. 12).

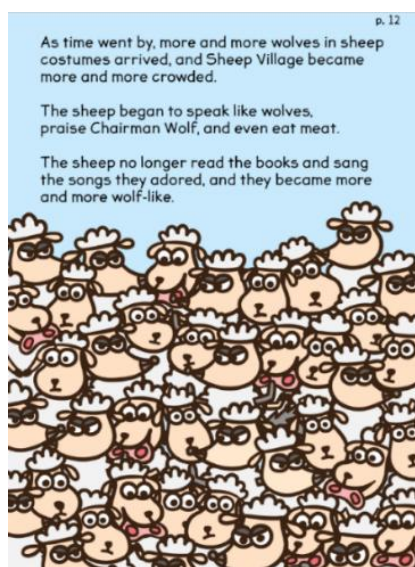


Fig 2. Wolves in sheep costume

The othering strategy is evident. The sheep are blended into wolves dressed in sheep costumes, but they are different in their nature. The image in Figure 2 elaborates on the text to show how some wolves are dressed in sheep costume by revealing their grey eyes (Sheep Village 2.0, n.d., p. 12). Considering the authors' claim that the government is carrying out “cultural and linguistic cleansing” (Sheep Village 2.0, n.d., p. 26), the image can be interpreted as China's attempt to marginalize the core values of Hong Kong over time by sending Chinese mainlanders into Hong Kong under Article 22. The texts together with the image are thus a representation of the concerns expressed by Hongkongers about China's influence that threatens Hong Kong's unique culture and values. By dressing the wolves in sheep costumes, the image visualizes the mainlandization of Hong Kong, demonstrating how external influence has been internalized into society. The marginalization of Hong Kong values has been likened to the “Tibetization of Hong Kong” (Hung, 2014, p. 8). That is, Hong Kong awaits for “forced assimilation and tight control by Beijing” (Hung, 2014, p. 3). This assimilation is commonly known as the “mainlandization of Hong Kong” (Lo, 2008; Zamecki, 2020). The last governor of Hong Kong Chris Patten, holding the role of “primary definer” in the phenomenon (Flowerdew & Leong, 2007), has defined Beijing's policy succinctly as “a Hong Kong without Hong Kongers” (Patten, 2022, p. 487).

The metaphor of the wolves eating meat reflects the harsh reality of Hong Kong's core values being progressively taken away by China after the handover. For instance, the National Security Law has severely restricted many of the rights and freedoms promised under the Joint Declaration. The metaphor of the sheep speaking like wolves and praising Chairman Wolf indicates the forced assimilation into a single Chinese identity through ideological education. Since the 1989 Tiananmen Square Massacre, Chinese ideological education portrays China as the victim of “century of humiliation” and emphasizes CCP achievements but minimizes its policy disasters (Bates, 2022; Zhao, 2021; Y. Wang, 2020).

3.3. The Wolf

The metaphor of the wolf and its variations illustrate Hongkongers as victims who fight against oppression. Although the wolf is often a symbol of loyalty and intelligence, in children's fables they are represented as vicious and brutal oppressors who abuse those weaker than them. In biblical texts behind the metaphor, the wolf is often a symbol of a threat.

Chairman Wolf was very happy to find out that the shepherd had left, and he recruited Big Bad Wolf and ordered him: "Wear this sheep costume and go blend in with the sheep! Soon we'll be able to eat them all" (Sheep Village 2.0, n.d., p. 8).

The metaphor above shows that the position of Chief Executive of the HKSAR, represented by Big Bad Wolf, has replaced the colonial governor. Chief Executive Carrie Lam was appointed by Xi Jinping, represented here by Chairman Wolf. In contrast to the metaphor of the sheep eating grass, the metaphor of the wolf eating the sheep is symbolic of Chinese influence over Hong Kong since the handover. The timing of the publication of *Sheep Village*, shortly after the imposition of the National Security Law, makes this interpretation plausible. The actions of Lam's government that led to the imposition of the National Security Law represent this influence. Using framing and othering strategies, the metaphor portrays the HKSAR government, and by extension the Chinese government, as the oppressive Other that the Hongkongers need to fight against.

The metaphor of Chairman Wolf is presented as an external threat. In biblical texts behind this metaphor, wolves are symbolic of danger to the sheep. However, this interpretation is not straightforward and has its limitations. Delving deeper into the biblical metaphors behind the trilogy, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to comfort his followers after his ascension into heaven. But nowhere in the Bible does it portray the comforter as a wolf. Drawing on an analogy, the guiding figure of Xi Jinping enters the scene after the departure of the father-shepherd Chris Patten. While some may feel that "Grandpa Xi" is indeed a caring and protective figure who comforts his children after the departure of their father, the trilogy portrays Xi Jinping as a representation of the dominance that threatens the children. Joshua Wong, the face of the 2012 anti-National Education campaign, describes Xi succinctly when he writes, "Xi is a wolf in panda's clothing, whose gentle, understated public persona belies ambition and ruthlessness" (J. Wong, 2020, p. 234). The interpretation of Chairman Wolf being an overbearing grandfather is revealed in the personality cult of Xi Jinping. In China, Xi is known as "Grandpa Xi", who enforces his totalitarianism on the "red children" (S. S. Chan & Lau, 2021). The threat therefore points to an overbearing grandfather who forces his authority on the children, as demonstrated in the metaphor of the wolf eating the sheep and telling Big Bad Wolf to do the same. The projection of Hongkongers as victims of oppression is repeated throughout the trilogy.

Resistance to the invading wolves is a dominant theme featured throughout the trilogy. It illustrates the powerless but united Hongkongers defending their home. The following two related extracts illustrate how Hongkongers who stood up for their rights during the 2019 Hong Kong protests became victims to police brutality:

Although the sheep did not have sharp teeth, they were brave like soldiers defending their homes. Although the sheep did not have sharp claws, they were determined like firefighters who save lives (Sheep Village 2.0, n.d., p. 17).

The wolves used their fangs and sharp claws to attack the sheep, and released stink bombs all over the place, leaving the sheep grasping for air. Even though many of the sheep did not even have horns, they did not back down. Some sheep's eyes were so badly battered that they could no longer see, and some sheep's hooves were so severely beaten that they could no longer walk. Nevertheless, they helped each other and fought back with courage (Sheep Village 2.0, n.d., pp. 19-20).

In the related extracts above, the framing strategy is evident. The lack of sharp teeth, sharp claws, and horns in the sheep contrasts with the presence of fangs and sharp claws in the wolves. These are presented as given facts. Despite their lack of sharp teeth, the sheep are framed as brave soldiers and determined firefighters. In contrast, the wolves are framed as the attackers who "used their fangs and sharp claws to attack the sheep". The metaphors of the sharp teeth and sharp claws can be a representation of traditional powers that the Hong Kong protesters did not possess. The comparison to soldiers and firefighters defending their homes and saving lives is associated with bravery, selflessness, and a sense of duty. This depiction counters the official narrative of violent and disruptive protesters.

The metaphors of the fangs and claws could symbolize the power and resources available to the HKSAR government. These power and resources were dispensed against Hongkongers during the 2019 Hong Kong protests, often with tear gas that left the protesters struggling to breathe. The metaphor of the horn can be a symbol of power or defense that Hongkongers lack, yet they did not retreat. The metaphor can be interpreted as the determination and resilience of the protesters, who in the face of powerful forces and physical challenges continued to stand up for the freedoms and autonomy of Hong Kong.

Sheep's hooves are essential for mobility and survival. The metaphor of the hooves in the second extract thus could be a representation of protesters that were injured by police use of force. The metaphor likely refers to the incident when a teenage boy was shot with live rounds in the leg during the protests (Chung & Leung, 2019). The metaphor of the battered eye refers to a notable incident of police brutality. A protester was shot in the eye needed to undergo emergency reconstruction surgery (Kilpatrick, 2019). This incident had led to protests at Hong Kong's international airport on August 12, 2019, resulting in its shutdown. Many protesters wore eye patches symbolic of their collective resistance against the heavy-handed police tactics.

The metaphor of wolves in sheep costume is a variation of the metaphor of the wolf. The metaphor originates from the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament Bible, referring to false leaders whose true nature are revealed by their action. The metaphor provides valuable insights into the complex relationship between the Chief Executive of the HKSAR government and Beijing. Although the Basic Law enshrines an important concept of "Hong Kong people administering Hong Kong", the Chief Executive is also responsible to the Central People's Government. While the office holder is elected by an election committee representing different industry sectors of the HKSAR, the candidate must have been first approved by the Central People's Government. The metaphor thus represents an ultimate betrayal to the people of Hong Kong. To Hongkongers, Chief Executive Lam not only played a role contrary to the demands of the Hongkongers, but also ordered the police turn against her own people, as indicated in the below extract:

Upon seeing the sheep resist, the wolves removed their sheep costumes and resumed their wolf-like appearance to fight the sheep (Sheep Village 2.0, n.d., p. 18).

In this extract, the othering strategy can be seen. The wolves are the Other in this instance. It depicts the wolves as the HKSAR government dropping any pretense of serving the interests of the people of Hong Kong in the face of resistance and openly acting in the interests of the CCP. The most salient example is the five demands made by the protesters during the 2019 Hong Kong protests, of which only one had been met—the withdrawal of the Bill. However, it was only withdrawn after months of no political action. The delay and inaction to the demands are likely the reasons for the continued violent clashes with the police.

3.4. The Village

Another salient metaphoric theme is the village, representing the community and system. Hong Kong has its own systems and a distinct lifestyle that differ from China. *Sheep Village* and *Wolf Village* represent the two systems and lifestyles. The metaphor of the village is grounded in the metaphor of the household of God in biblical texts. For instance, the Church community in the New Testament Bible is often referred to as the household of God. In contrast, Babylon is often depicted as a wicked entity that oppresses the Church. The two separate villages in the trilogy are therefore a metaphoric representation of the oppression that a community faces under another community, represented by *Sheep Village* and *Wolf Village* respectively.

In contrast to *Sheep Village* in Figures 1, Figure 3's dominant colour is grey blue and grey green (*Sheep Village 2.0, n.d., p. 5*). The greying of the blue and green symbolically enacts the suppression of individual freedoms, reinforcing the contrast between Hong Kong's past prosperity and autonomy (Figure 1) and the present loss of vitality under Beijing's influence (Figure 3). Chairman Wolf comes to the foreground of the image to illustrate the wolves' absolute obedience to him. A stark contrast is therefore created. The individual freedoms and prosperity represented in Figure 1 are replaced with muted shades, suggesting a loss of vitality. The change in colour palette symbolizes the suppression of rights under the new regime. This interpretation of the village and colour symbolism align with the trilogy's broader narrative of increasing influence from the Chinese mainland that poses a threat to Hong Kong's core values.

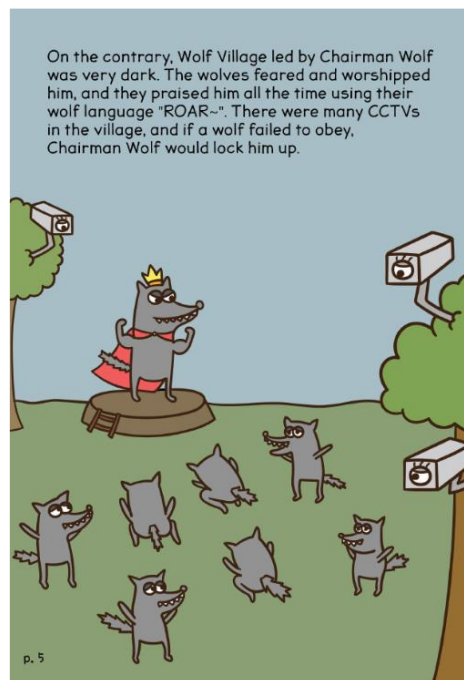


Fig 3. Wolf Village

Using foregrounding strategy to highlight the differences, the metaphor seeks to contrast the oppressive environment of Wolf Village:

On the contrary, Wolf Village led by Chairman Wolf was very dark. The wolves feared and worshipped him, and they praised him all the time using their wolf language "ROAR~". There were many CCTVs in the village, and if a wolf failed to obey, Chairman Wolf would lock him up (Sheep Village 2.0, n.d., p. 5).

According to Rühlig (2020), the United Kingdom has founded Hong Kong and ruled the city for over 150 years. It has become home to Westerners and Chinese refugees escaping political turmoil on the Chinese mainland. There are also many foreign domestic workers as well as Hongkongers of other ethnicities. Although most Hongkongers are ethnically Chinese, the result of British rule has turned Hong Kong into a vastly distinct culture separate from China. For instance, there are two politically distinct cultures that have created tensions between Hong Kong and China (Zamecki, 2020). Whereas Hong Kong has been influenced by Western-style democratization, it is at odds with the values of loyalty, harmony, and conformity beholden by the CCP (Lo, 2008). Patriotism in China, therefore, is equivalent to loving the CCP without any reservation. That kind of patriotism contrasts with the understanding of the term in Hong Kong, where patriotism is infused with liberalism (E. Chan & J. Chan, 2014). The CCP's forceful narrative of reunification has created conditions under which CEAP can be applied.

3.5. Discussion and Implications

a) Lesson suggestions

The previous section examined the symbolic meanings embedded in the texts. According to the authors, the stories are designed for children aged seven and above, though they can also be read with younger children from the age of four with parental guidance. This section offers pedagogical recommendations informed by CEAP principles, adapted for a child-appropriate context. Although the *Sheep Village* series is no longer commercially available due to suppression and the closure of its official distribution channels, copies of the texts remain accessible in archived digital collections, private collections, or through contact with the exiled translators. Using these sources, the series can serve as a foundation for activities that explore Hong Kong's history, social structures, and concepts of justice. Drawing on CEAP's emphasis on critical questioning, educators or parents might guide children through age-appropriate prompts such as: "Who is shown as the hero?", "Who appears to be the antagonist?", and "What could someone do to protect their home if it were threatened by wolves?" These prompts can then be paired with structured activities, such as cooperative games, storytelling exercises, and guided

discussion, all designed to foster critical literacy, perspective-taking, and collaborative problem-solving in English.

In addition to guided questioning, age-appropriate physical activities can help children engage with the themes in *Sheep Village* while practicing English in meaningful contexts. One example is a cooperative “Sheep Village Protection” game. Children are divided into two groups: “sheep” and “wolves”. The sheep begin in a designated “village area”, while the wolves attempt to gently tag them. Wolves are free to decide whom to tag, allowing children to experience decision-making and the consequences of power in a safe, playful context. Sheep can cooperate by linking arms, forming small circles around vulnerable sheep, or developing simple strategies to protect the group, highlighting the importance of solidarity and collective action. Roles are rotated so all children experience being both sheep and wolves.

Throughout the activity, English is used as the medium for discussion and reflection. After the game, the facilitator guides children through CEAP-inspired, age-appropriate questions, such as: “How did it feel to be a sheep? A wolf?”, “How did the wolves’ choices affect the group?”, “What strategies helped the sheep work together?”, and “Which parts of the story reflect what happened in our game?”

Teachers can scaffold English language use by providing sentence starters or key vocabulary, such as “cooperate”, “protect”, “strategy”, or “teamwork”. Children are encouraged to construct their answers in full sentences, justify their reasoning, and compare their experiences to the story. This approach allows learners to practice English in context, develop critical thinking skills, and explore power, cooperation, and community in a playful, safe, and developmentally appropriate way. By combining embodied play with guided reflection, children engage in CEAP-informed critical literacy while strengthening English communication skills.

The pedagogical value of *Sheep Village* also points to broader possibilities for children’s literature in societies experiencing political tension or democratic struggles. Other countries that have more recently been invaded by foreign forces, or undergone mass protests and major civil movements, from Ukraine to Indonesia to Thailand to Bangladesh, may similarly find that allegorical storytelling offers a child-friendly way to discuss themes of justice, solidarity, and critical thinking. The aim is not to replicate Hong Kong’s experience, but to illustrate how locally grounded narratives can help young learners make sense of social issues in ways that are culturally and age appropriate. In this sense, *Sheep Village* serves as an example of how communities might develop their own storybooks that combine imaginative storytelling with opportunities for guided reflection, language development, and critical literacy.

b) *The Tibetan experience and implications for Hong Kong*

Before turning to the implications for Hong Kong, it is helpful to consider a comparative case where a displaced community has already institutionalized education as a tool for cultural survival. The Tibetan experience offers a clear example of how a diaspora can sustain national identity, political memory and cultural transmission outside its homeland.

Tibetan nationalism in exile emerged as a response to Chinese occupation and was reinforced through educational materials, cultural institutions and religious practices (Coelho & Somayaji, 2022; McConnell, 2009). Nationalism, which fosters a collective cultural identity, serves as a foundation for nation-building. Coelho and Somayaji (2022) argue that while newly decolonized states like India were able to establish nationhood within defined territorial boundaries, Tibetans faced the challenge of constructing their national identity outside their homeland. They suggest that Tibetan elites only began conceptualizing Tibet as a nation after resettlement in India, aligning with the notion that a nation materializes when a significant portion of a community perceives itself as such.

The Tibetan Government-in-Exile is responsible for establishing schools to educate Tibetan children in exile (McConnell, 2016). Coelho and Somayaji (2022) note that the Dalai Lama was concerned that Tibetan children studying in Indian schools would eventually lose their cultural identity. To prevent this, he asked Nehru to establish Tibetan schools in India to ensure the preservation of Tibetan language and traditions. These schools incorporate a modified National Council of Educational Research and Training curriculum, allowing students to learn about Tibetan language, history, culture and geography. While Tibetan schools downplay distinctions between Tibetans and their Indian hosts, they emphasize historical tensions with China (Kolas, 1996). The Dal Lake school in Dharamshala, for example, offers a six-week

summer programme for Tibetan children from the diaspora, where they learn Tibetan language, history, culture and music (Coelho & Somayaji, 2022).

By contrast, Hongkongers typically enrol their children in the local education systems of their host countries (Ho, 2023; K. C. Wong & Yan, 2022). For example, prior to the handover, Hong Kong children who emigrated to Canada or Australia attended schools in those countries. While Western education offers various benefits, it also poses the risk of eroding Cantonese language and cultural heritage.

A parallel with the Tibetan experience can therefore be drawn with Hong Kong's exiles. Iu (2025) finds that the protest slogan "Liberate Hong Kong, Revolution of Our Times" draws a stateless nation together. This emerging sense of national belonging in exile aligns with Tibetan trajectory. Thus, one potential role for Hong Kong grassroots organizations in the diaspora is to establish community schools for Hong Kong children. These complementary schools could serve to educate children about Hong Kong culture and democratic values. The development of curricula for Hong Kong children, the adoption of "Glory to Hong Kong" as Hong Kong's national anthem and the preservation of Hong Kong traditions in exile all contribute to the formation of a diasporic national consciousness.

This article contends that these grassroots organizations could incorporate the *Sheep Village* texts into an alternative curriculum that introduces children to foundational democratic principles, including governance, power dynamics, civil liberties, human rights and resistance to oppression, as a counterpoint to the nationalistic education promoted by the HKSAR government. Through the teaching of texts, exiled children can develop their language skills while also learning about Hong Kong's history, power dynamics and the impact of injustice. Lesson activities such as drawing and reflective writing can help them process their feelings about their homeland and exile, fostering both linguistic and emotional development.

The Tibetan case demonstrates that a dispersed community can successfully build institutions that preserve identity and political memory. This is a lesson that has direct relevance for Hongkongers seeking to nurture a new civic generation in exile. In this sense, the repatriation of 5.4 million Hongkongers to the metropole over time could similarly lead to a "parallel Hong Kong" on British soil. This relocation could be seen as the United Kingdom's direct response to the totalitarian party-state's recurring breaches of the Sino-British Joint Declaration. By doing so, the United Kingdom can fulfil its promise to Hong Kong of political autonomy under the Joint Declaration. A new Hong Kong under British protection could facilitate Hongkongers' self-determination of their own political futures (K. H. Wong, 2025b).

4. Conclusion

According to Lu and Singh (2017), many intellectuals living under the Chinese regime use an oblique mode of critical thinking to express their message to avoid detection and confrontation. This is helped by the abundance of homophones in the Chinese language. For instance, the couplet "生如夏花, 却被折下" (life is as summer flowers, yet it is cut off) has been used to describe the deep sufferings of Chinese students during the Cultural Revolution (Lu & Singh, 2017). In view of the National Security Law in Hong Kong, it is likely that the speech therapists have chosen to use metaphors to articulate their message about totalitarian oppression and sufferings of Hongkongers. The way these metaphors have been used in the trilogy are specific to the political events in Hong Kong after the transfer of sovereignty. The use of metaphors can not only be seen as resistance against China's assault on Hong Kong, but also as a distinct Hongkonger identity with its own voice, using colloquial Cantonese rather than standard written Chinese in the original trilogy.

Given the common experience of people who identify as Hongkongers, it may be difficult for outsiders to fully understand the message that the trilogy was trying to convey in metaphors. The hegemonic struggle for a Hong Kong nation with its own distinct identity can be successfully maintained and preserved through these metaphors by Hong Kong's exiles to pass onto their offspring and future generations. It is important to note here that while the authors have used metaphors to cryptically describe Hongkongers as victims of political repression, they have been convicted on sedition charges. Judge Kwok Wai-kin wrote in his judgement:

The publishers of the books clearly refuse to recognize that the People's Republic of China has resumed exercising sovereignty over Hong Kong, nor do they recognize the new constitutional order in the region, and lead the children to think that what the authorities both in mainland China and Hong Kong have done is wrong and illegitimate (B. Wong, 2022, para. 17).

The judge's ruling can itself be treated as a discursive text, where presupposition strategies are deployed to naturalize China's sovereignty over Hong Kong and to legitimize the new constitutional order. By analyzing this ruling through the same CDA lens applied to *Sheep Village*, it becomes evident that the state's official historiography directly conflicts with the grassroots counter-memory preserved by the diaspora. While the trilogy uses metaphors to articulate resistance and maintain a distinct Hongkonger identity, the court ruling seeks to delegitimize this perspective and enforce hegemonic control. This juxtaposition highlights how collective memory and political identity are contested through discourse and underscores the role of metaphoric and narrative strategies in sustaining nationalism and cultural memory among exiled communities.

In this extract, the presiding judge uses a presupposition strategy. He presupposes that Hong Kong is a part of China, and, therefore, the action of the authorities is right and legitimate. But there is evidence of manipulation, which occurs "if speakers willfully make assumptions about their hearers which they know not to be the case of presupposition" (Flowerdew, 2004, p. 1561). Given the political climate and the opposition landslide win in the 2019 district elections during the year-long protests, it is not difficult to surmise that Hongkongers believed the government was wrong about Hong Kong's status. Two forms of power are manifested in the case. The punishment for resistance and dissent represents dominance and control exerted through the institution of the law (Statham, 2022). Hegemonic power is also manifested by persuading the public that the values of the government—in this case, China's sovereignty over Hong Kong and its assimilation process—are valid and legitimate. It is ironic that the conviction confirms the self-actualizing message the trilogy wanted to convey in the first place. Despite the book ban in Hong Kong, the exiled teachers have preserved and translated the books. The events in Hong Kong's history can be passed on to future generations through the translations, and the struggle against China's invasion of Hong Kong continues in exile.

Future research could explore how allegorical children's literature functions as a tool for critical literacy in other diasporic or political exile contexts. Comparative studies might examine how locally grounded narratives influence young learners' understanding of social justice, identity, and civic participation across different cultural settings.

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Declarations

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
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I support ELTEJ in maintaining high standards of personal conduct, practicing honesty in all our professional practices and endeavors. |
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