

Competing Perceptions of China's Greater Bay Area Plan in Hong Kong and Macau's Media: A Comparative Phraseological Analysis

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Abstract

The study conducts a comparative analysis to examine how China's Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GBA) plan is perceived in Hong Kong and Macau's media. Based on the methods of corpus-driven analysis of quantitative data and qualitative discourse analysis, this study provides valuable insights into competing media construction in implementing and evaluating China's GBA plan in Hong Kong and Macau. Results demonstrate that Macau's press attaches great importance to the in-depth cooperation and mutual development of the plan. In contrast, Hong Kong's press holds a pessimistic view, worrying whether the city's status and advantages would be threatened under the plan. The study further discusses the press freedom, social-political factors and national identity that influence competing media construction of the plan. Additionally, it explores the geopolitical implications of China's cross-border integration plan.

Keywords: China, Greater Bay Area plan, Hong Kong-Macau, corpus linguistics, media discourse, discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area (GBA hereafter), is a transformation from the former Pearl River Delta region ("world's factory") in southern China (Li et al., 2022a). The GBA plan is a tactical initiative to promote cooperative development between mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macau, where the "One Country, Two Systems" policy is practiced. This unique status determines the role of Hong Kong and Macau as bridges between China and the capitalist countries (Chen, 2019). However, with the profound political and economic changes, deeper contradictions within Hong Kong society have emerged (Cai et al., 2022). Hong Kong has experienced turbulent transformations in its pursuit of transition, and its relationship with mainland China has not been a smooth sailing. China's cross-border integration processes have led to Hong Kong people's resistant and hostile stance toward China and Chinese government (Fong, 2017; Garrett, 2014; Wong et al., 2021). According to Li (2019), few young people are genuinely willing to integrate into the country or pursue personal advancement within the GBA. On the other hand, Macau residents believe that the GBA's construction will provide new development opportunities and platforms for youth in Macau. (Cai et al., 2022).

China's GBA plan has garnered global attention and has been extensively covered in the media. In order to deepen the comprehension of the subject, this study aims to compare relevant news reports from Macau and Hong Kong considering the differences between the two special administrative regions, that is, the former demonstrates fealty to Beijing and exhibits strong patriotic values while the latter regularly defies China's various encroachments and calls for democracy (Geddes, 2020). This study is driven by the primary objective to introduce a corpus-driven phraseological analysis to offer linguistic evidence that contributes to elucidating China's cross-border integration plan associated with Hong Kong and Macau. The main aims of the study include examining the similarities and differences in Hong Kong and Macau's preferential ways of portraying the GBA and, explicating the underlying socio-political factors. Specifically, the two research questions are: (1) What does the corpus-driven phraseological analysis reveal concerning the divergent discursive constructions associated with China's GBA plan in Macau-Hong Kong media? (2) How do we account for competing media constructions related to the GBA plan projected for Macau and Hong Kong?

2. Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macau Greater Bay Area

Issued by the CPC (Communist Party of China) Central Committee and the State Council in 2019, the GBA plan emphasised the regional coordination and the construction of an international scientific and technological innovation centre. With regard to regional coordination, Li et al. (2022b) conducted a quantitative analysis of public policies and presented measures of coordinated development policy mechanism optimization in GBA. Zhong et al. (2023) pointed out that coordinated development level in GBA is generally on the rise, but the unbalanced internal development and large regional differences still exist. As for building an international science and innovation centre, Wen (2019) demonstrated that the GBA's innovation capability has made significant advancements. But real challenges also exist in the area's research and development output quality, resource allocation, and talent structure (Liu et al, 2022).

In recent years, there has been a significant rise in resistance within Hong Kong society regarding the potential for economically integrating Hong Kong with mainland China (Yu, 2019). The escalating pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong pressured the Chinese government to introduce the GBA plan to foster closer ties between Hong Kong and mainland China (Hou, 2023).

Many critics have emerged in Hong Kong news reports like "...national integration plan will hurt Hong Kong's own long-term interests, while helping the progress of rival cities" (Chung and Wong, 2019) and "Article 43 is a direct infringement on the rights to privacy of Hong Kong people because it nullifies judicial scrutiny on surveillance" after introducing the GBA plan (Wong, 2020). According to Gao and Feng (2023), the overall sentiment towards China within Hong Kong press is becoming increasingly negative. As for Macau, Sheng et al. (2023) contended that this city has lost sufficient local autonomy under China's integration process. However, criticisms in Macau news reports are few and far between. By far, there is very little research concerning the GBA plan associated with Macau and Hong Kong's media. Particularly, no scholar has ever explained why Hong Kong's press has much more critical and negative commentary than Macau's. The corpus-driven phraseological analysis of frequency-based sets of data is notably to provide a novel and valid method to compare China's GBA plan in the setting of Macau-Hong Kong media narratives.

3. Analytical Frameworks

Corpus-driven discourse analysis is a method that integrates corpus linguistics and discourse analysis to systematically extract linguistic categories from the recurring patterns and frequency distributions observed in language within a specific context (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001). The corpus provides a rich and representative sample of language use, enabling researchers to explore the power relations, social practices, and ideological assumptions embedded in texts (Fairclough, 2001). Primary methods used to analyse representative samples involve examining wordlists, keywords, concgrams, collocates, and concordances. These samples are collections of the occurrences of lexical items and other wordforms and can undergo qualitative analysis to explore semantic, functional, or attitudinal meanings (Sinclair, 1991, 1996).

Sinclair's (2004) definition of lexical item is shaped by his idea of the phraseological tendency and denotes the lexical structure not simply to a word. The phraseological tendency constitutes a multi-word lexical item or an extended unit of meaning. The phenomenon of extended units of meaning rarely exists in isolation from the context in which they are found (Sinclair, 1996, 2004). Multi-word-units are also characterized by the strict correlation that exists between a node and its context (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001:19). Corpus linguistics has offered evidence supporting the adoption of the extended-unit-of-meaning model in language, as a deeper understanding of the larger phrasal unit of meaning is achieved through identifying patterns of co-selection within the corpus.

Methodologically, keywords and concgrams serve as starting points that guide analysts to key concepts within a text. As Baker (2006) explains, keywords are words that exhibit significantly higher frequency or uniqueness in one corpus when compared to another. By closely examining how these keywords are contextually employed, researchers can decipher their significance in portraying socio-political and ideological foundations. According to Cheng et al. (2006: 414), a concgram is "all of the permutations of constituency variation and positional variation generated by the association of two or more words". Concgrams "represent more fully word associations in a corpus" (Cheng et al., 2006: 411) and help better understand words in combination rather than in isolation. Research utilizing concgrams primarily centres on investigating the thematic content of texts and corpora (Cheng et al., 2009; Cheng and Lam, 2013; Greaves and Warren, 2007).

Sinclair (2004) identified five categories of co-selection for analysing extended meanings of words. The five descriptive categories are "core," "colligation," "collocation," "semantic preference," and "semantic prosody" (Sinclair, 2004). "Core" is a mandatory category that remains invariable and serves as evidence of the occurrence of the item (Sinclair, 2004). In practice, nodes are regarded as "core". "Colligation" and "collocation" are both

optional categories, focusing on the grammatical or structural relationships between words and the frequent co-occurrence of words, respectively (Sinclair, 2004). “Semantic preference” is an optional category about the inclination of words to co-occur with specific meanings or contexts (Sinclair, 2004). Lastly, “semantic prosody” refers to the overall positive, negative, or neutral associations linked with word co-occurrences. This category is also considered as “the determiner of the meaning of the whole lexical item” (Sinclair, 2004: 141).

Sinclair’s five categories of co-selection as the framework was initially developed for English language learning, teaching, and English-Chinese contrastive phraseological studies. However, there has been limited application in the analysis of media discourse. Cheng and Lam (2013) investigated political-related topics within the context of before and after the handover of Hong Kong by examining phraseological profiles and patterns in the media corpus. This study utilizes Sinclair’s five categories of co-selection as a framework to conduct a phraseological analysis to explore the sociopolitical factors and ideological stances related to the GBA plan projected for Macau-Hong Kong media.

4. Methodology

4.1 Data Description

This study is based on two corpora: the Macau Daily Times corpus (MDT) and the South China Morning Post corpus (SCMP). MDT is chosen for its prominence of English-language newspaper that serves as a primary source of news and information for the local and international community in Macau. It has been proactive in reporting and analysing socio-political issues within the region since it was established in 1999, shortly after Macau’s handover from Portugal to China. Moreover, MDT is a popular choice as a representative of Macau’s coverage with numerous studies using it to analyse the city’s image (Pan, 2018; Yuan, 2015).

SCMP is selected to analyse Hong Kong’s media construction of the GBA plan. It was noted that SCMP was regarded as the most credible paid-for newspaper in Hong Kong. Ju (2021) explored the national identity of SCMP, emphasizing the weak political identification of the newspaper and its role in providing alternative perspectives. Therefore, a contrastive analysis between Macau’s and Hong Kong’s press association with the GBA plan is predictably representative between the two special administrative regions.

All the news texts were collected and examined from 5 March, 2017 to 30 December, 2022. The initial date 5 March marks the time when former Chinese premier Li Keqiang announced “formulating the GBA development plan”. The data were gathered after retrieving the search items *Greater Bay Area* or *GBA* of related news reports from LexisNexis database. Subsequently, the two corpora were constructed by manually removing irrelevant information such as copyright details, load date, and publisher information. Additionally, news texts that did not primarily focus on the GBA were excluded based on analytical relevance. The word counts of the two corpora are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Data description of the two corpora

	Texts (<i>n</i>)	Words (<i>n</i>)
Macau Daily Times (MDT)	96	36,727
South China Morning Post (SCMP)	144	90,258

The discrepancy in size between the two corpora is insignificant for the validity of the comparative analysis due to the consistent selection criteria and varying levels of media focus on China’s GBA plan.

4.2 Research Design

Corpus linguistics tools provide the techniques for generating frequency data, which allows researchers to quantify and observe language patterns.

Firstly, word frequency lists were generated by ConcGram 1.0 (Greaves, 2009) to have an overall understanding of the core issues in the two corpora. Subsequently, phraseologies were extracted from the raw data of two-word concgram generated by ConcGram 1.0. Functional or grammatical associations were excluded at this stage by exerting the exclusion lists. This process aims to concentrate solely on lexically rich two-word associations that reflect the aboutness of the two corpora. Notably, common two-word concgrams like “Hong/Kong” were identified as a single word, representing the city name “Hong Kong”. Therefore, the phraseologies for “Hong Kong” were generated using the three-word concgram function. For example, the three-word phraseology *Hong Kong/said* is the combination of the frequent two-word concgram *Hong/said* and *Kong/said*. For this step, the frequent lexical words and concgrams were grouped as “shared”, indicating the common aboutness of the GBA plan projected for

Macau-Hong Kong press.

Secondly, we used Lancsbox 4.0 (Brezina, 2015) to generate keywords by swapping the MDT and the SCMP with each other as study corpus and reference corpus. This is beneficial for the present study because the general English corpus would not be an ideal reference corpus to generate statistical prominence. We classified the keywords as “salient” aboutness of the GBA plan associated with the MDT and SCMP’s media construction (see Table 2).

Finally, we conduct a phraseological analysis of shared frequent words, concgrams, and salient keywords to deductively unveil how the GBA plan is constructed within Macau’s and Hong Kong’s press.

Table 2. Normalized frequencies ($\times 1000$) of shared frequent words and concgrams and keywords in MDT and SCMP.

Shared frequent concgrams and words (MDT/SCMP)	Greater Bay Area (5.64/5.94), Hong Kong/Macau (2.00/2.22), plan (2.47/2.71), policy (0.83/0.76), government (2.97/2.29), work (0.64/1.10), competition (1.00/0.26)
Salient keywords in MDT	development (5.52), promote (0.78), measures (1.03), cooperation (2.41), innovation (1.25), new (2.94), top (0.78), major (0.69)
Salient keywords in SCMP	concern (0.19), worry (0.17), fear (0.08), risk (0.19), lack (0.21), protests (0.36), restrictions (0.26), limited (0.26), difficult (0.16)

5. Findings

5.1 Shared Frequent Concgrams & Words

Greater Bay Area is the most frequently shared concgram in the two corpora, occurring 207 times (0.56%) in MDT and 536 times (0.59%) in SCMP. In MDT, we searched its abbreviation, namely *GBA*, and found out it appeared 286 times in total with collocated words such as *development* (31), *cities* (24), *plan* (14), *cooperation* (9), *tourism* (9), etc. These frequent collocations reflect three semantic preferences of GBA: 1. a megalopolis incorporating nine Guangdong Cities, Hong Kong, and Macau; 2. a national plan to build a world-class bay area; 3. a cross-border initiative to boost the development and cooperation of this region. The above three categories suggest the definition, leverage, and vista of GBA in the eye of MDT. In SCMP, it has the same definition of GBA indicated by collocated words such as *plan* (66), *cities* (33), *project* (24), *blueprint* (17), and *initiative* (16) (see Figure 1).

1 Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong said: "The **Greater Bay Area Initiative** is a major opportunity for
 2 Carrie Lam also unveils channel for contact on **Greater Bay Area** development initiative Hong Kong has
 3 boss points to a lack of detail in **blueprint** for **Greater Bay Area** plan and says he has still to determine
 4 Lam dismissed critics' worries over Beijing's "**Greater Bay Area**" plan, which aims at integrating Hong
 5 turmoil will have an impact on China's ambitious **Greater Bay Area** (GBA) plan to turn Hong Kong, Macau and
 6 for any state leader to take the job. "The **Greater Bay Area** project is a national strategy endorsed
 7 resolve as they bolstered their positions in the **Greater Bay Area**, Beijing's ambitious project to combine
 8 Hong Kong to 44 cities on the mainland. The **Greater Bay Area** is Beijing's **blueprint** to transform Hong
 9 systems" policy is a key strength of the new "**Greater Bay Area**" blueprint for China that will make it
 10 "We are very keen on the development in the **Greater Bay Area**, which is an important region in [the]

Figure 1. Sample concordance lines for *Greater Bay Area* in SCMP

In order to have a deeper understanding of Hong Kong and Macau’s emotional attitudes toward GBA, we searched the colligated adjective words of *Greater Bay Area*. In MDT, *Greater Bay Area* is closely connected with *top*, *new*, *key*, *first*, etc. (32 out of 67,48%), emphasizing the predominance of the GBA plan. The following example illustrates the significance of GBA in Macau and expectations towards further progress led by the GBA plan (see Extract 1).

(1) MDT 18 November, 2022

The overall GBA development plan is a key strategic project strongly supported by the national government and local governments in the region. We believe that it will achieve significant long-term growth, and deepen service trade liberalization across the border, benefiting the insurance and other industries.

In SCMP, collocates of *Greater Bay Area* include *key* (10), *important* (9), *ambitious* (6), showing a shared recognition of the GBA plan and a positive view towards GBA project (30%,25 out of 83). However, negative collocates like *limited*, *difficult*, and *rough* (7%,6 out of 83) indicate the restrictions of GBA and certain pessimistic emotions. Besides, it’s suggested that Hong Kong even had potential worries on the GBA plan. We can thus

conclude that the two media reach consensus on the importance of GBA, but sceptical and pessimistic voices exist in Hong Kong's SCMP.

Another frequently shared concgram is *Hong Kong/Macau*, which occurs 73 times (0.20%) in MDT and 201 times (0.22%) in SCMP. In MDT, the frequent collocates of the concgram *Hong Kong/Macau* include *invest/investors/investment* (12) and *bank* (4), suggesting a semantic preference of investment in Hong Kong and Macau. Expressions such as “*facilitate cross-border investment*”, “*continue to accelerate investment*” and “*ramping up investment*” ... (69%, 11 out of 16) further illustrate a semantic prosody of “favourable investment”. The rise of investment in Hong Kong and Macau is probably attributed to “Wealth Management Connect” (WMC), a mechanism enables residents in GBA to purchase cross-boundary wealth management products distributed by the region's banks. After a reading of the concordance line of the semantic phrase “*Wealth Management Connect*” in MDT, we found noticeable statements claiming that WMC scheme will boost the investment in Hong Kong and Macau.

Hong Kong's SCMP also shows interest in this new financial scheme, with 10 occurrences of *WMC* recorded in the corpus. However, there are some complaining comments on the new program, such as “*I have no clue how this Wealth Management Connect is going to work.*” and “*Proposed two years ago, the wealth management connect still lacks...*”. Different from MDT's optimistic report, the WMC scheme was constructed as lacking details and actions in SCMP.

Plan is a frequently shared word in the two corpora, occurring 89 times (0.25%) in MDT and 240 times (0.27%) in SCMP. In MDT, the most frequent lexical collocates of *plan* is *development* (28), and the same is true in SCMP, with *development* occurring 23 times. Thus, the combined impact of the lexical pattern creates a significant semantic preference towards the development plan in both MDT and SCMP. It is noted that MDT is prone to reflect a positive emotional attitude on the plan, illustrating the bright prospects of GBA under specific instructions.

SCMP, on the other hand, suggests a negative attitude toward the plan. Extract 2 implies that a voice of doubt exists noticeably in Hong Kong's press, questioning whether the plan will damage its interests or affect its competitive edge. Extract 3 even indicates a lack of detail in the blueprint of the GBA plan, doubting the effectiveness of detail construction of the plan. Unlike MDT's unanimous recognition of the development plan, SCMP indicates a sceptical attitude toward formulating and implementing the GBA plan.

(2) SCMP 26 March, 2019

Critics have questioned whether the national integration plan will hurt Hong Kong's own long-term interests, while helping the progress of rival cities.

(3) SCMP 16 April, 2018

Kerry Logistics boss points to a lack of detail in blueprint for the GBA plan and says he has still to determine if crossing is cost-effective.

Another shared frequent word is *policy*, with 30 times (0.08%) recorded in MDT and 67 times (0.08%) in SCMP. The most common policy mentioned in the two press is “One Country, Two Systems”, occurring 10 times in MDT and 45 in SCMP respectively. However, MDT and SCMP have noticeable conflicts in interpreting the functions and possible effects of the policy under the GBA plan.

According to the news reference, MDT sees “One Country, Two Systems” as a unique advantage for the GBA plan, speaking highly of the policy under the international background. Extract 4 further indicates the great value brought by the GBA plan, suggesting that implementing GBA's plan is an enriching practice of this policy. The GBA plan and the “One Country, Two Systems” policy underlined in MDT shows significant conformity to CPC Central Committee's Outline Development Plan, reflecting a sense of identity on the national plan and policy. In SCMP, reports toward GBA and the “One Country, Two Systems” policy are dichotomized into two distinct parts (see Figure 2). With 65% (29 out of 45) of the instances showing positive semantic prosody, the supporters believe “One Country, Two Systems” is the unique strength to construct GBA. Nevertheless, quite a few people worry about the possible erosion of the principle under the integration of GBA, with statements such as “*the policy (One Country, Two Systems) would be compromised*”, “*affecting the implementation of the policy*” ... (25%) recorded as examples.

1 that the plan will affect the implementation of 'one country, two systems' ... But Hong Kong's integration would surely not m
 2 Beijing could rethink whether the principle of 'one country, two systems' remains the best model for the city, or whether
 3 fruition. "We have to insist on the principles of one country, two systems, Hong Kong people governing Hong Kong, 'Macau people
 4 al system. Quoting President Xi Jinping, Lam said one country, two systems was an important foundation for the Greater Bay Ar
 5 Bay Area and other bay areas in the world lies in one country, two systems. It is our strength, and also a principle of the w
 6 as the freest economy in the world for 25 years. One country, two systems is the biggest strength of Hong Kong and Macau, wh
 7 ve to look north for its own recovery. Under the "one country, two systems" governing principle, Hong Kong is guaranteed a hi
 8 k as it appears. Blessed with our unique edge of "one country, two systems", Hong Kong can achieve a lot more by cooperating
 9 would violate the Basic Law and the principle of "one country, two systems". "We should not be too accommodating to the conce
 10 ncept." Asked whether Hong Kong's uniqueness and one country, two systems would be compromised under the integration drive,

Figure 2. Sample concordance lines for *One Country, Two Systems* in SCMP

(4) MDT 17 July, 2020

The plan has defined the strategic position of the zone as a new platform to boost Macau's economic diversification, a new space for Macau residents' lives and employment, and a new model to enrich the practice of "One Country, Two Systems".

To make a brief summary, MDT and SCMP construct conflicting views on whether the GBA plan would enhance or undermine the "One Country, Two Systems" principle. While Macau embraces the GBA plan and "One Country, Two Systems" policy, Hong Kong reflects a competing and sceptical attitude toward the plan and policy.

As another noticeable shared frequent word, *government* appears 107 times (0.30%) in MDT and 203 times (0.23%) in SCMP. This word is noted to be preceded by *central* (19 times in MDT and 50 times in SCMP), consisting of a collocational pattern of *central government*. In both corpora, *central government* is viewed as the constitutor of the GBA plan. MDT shows a recognition of its capacity for planning and executing projects, whereas SCMP indicates a resentment against the central government by many young people (see Extract 5).

(5) SCMP 28 March, 2018

Only 0.3 per cent of those aged 18 to 29 identified as "Chinese", compared with 69.7 percent who considered themselves to be "Hongkongers". Commentators interpreted this as a reflection of resentment against the central government rather than an identity crisis.

Additionally, *government* in MDT is found to be preceded by *Macau* (19), *SAR (Special Administrative Region)* (14) and *Guangdong* (13). These municipal and provincial governments are followed by confirmative actions such as *announce* (4), *affirm* (2), *stress* (2), etc., (12 out of 46), showing local governments' commitment to closely align themselves with the directions of the GBA plan. In SCMP, the *local government*, namely the Hong Kong government (31), is noted to collocate with negative expressions like "not move with the times" and "insufficient effort to promote regional development scheme" ...etc. (6 out of 31,20%), indicating blame on local government's lagging in the path of regional development.

The following concordance lines of the collocational pattern *Macau government* and *Guangdong government* are found in a consistent pattern of co-selections with such words as *set* (5), *support* (5), *launch* (4), *invest/investment* (4) and so on in 66% (21 out of 32) in MDT, demonstrating the typical actions of the local government in GBA (see Figure 3).

1 Viagens e Turismo de Macau, suggested the Macao **Government** Tourism Office (MGTO) enter a closer partnership
 2 beyond GBA to drive length of stay The Macao **Government** Tourism Office (MGTO) is launching a new promot
 3 had been announced last year; that the Macao **government** will invest a total amount of 20 billion yuan
 4 a quicker recovery. In August, the local **government** launched a promotional scheme to encourage
 5 could swell to 100 billion yuan The Macao **government** has invested a total of RMB8 billion (MOP9.4
 6 function, which was set up by the Guangdong **government**. For example, an island for forestry purposes
 7 Greater Bay Area's overall goal, the Macau SAR **government** has also set up its own objectives when it comes
 8 gaming operator reaffirmed its support for the **government's** direction for development in the GBA. Some 300
 9 region of Hong Kong and the Guangdong provincial **government** are conducting a study on post-2020 regional air
 10 this year, with an aim of implementing the Macao **government's** policy of effectively developing the sports

Figure 3. Sample concordance lines for *government* in MDT

In SCMP, *government* shows a noticeable tendency to colligate with modal verbs including *should* (12), *would* (11), *could* (7), and *must* (4). While the modal verb *would* represent a possibility that the government will implement specific actions, *could* shows people's ideas and suggestions for the government on constructing GBA. However, another two modal verbs namely *should* and *must* reflect a stronger urge on the government to implement specific actions (see Figure 4). The conigram *government/modal verb* is frequently followed by *more* 24% (8 out of 34), indicating that the Hong Kong government should take more proactive initiatives to develop GBA and Hong Kong itself. Such semantic prosody further suggests Hong Kong's lack of activity in implementing the GBA plan.

1 resident. He said he was confident the Hong Kong government would treat his new airline fairly, given the
 2 Vice-Minister Qian Keming that the central government would pursue further opening up of the economy,
 3 Kong into the mainland either." She said the government would help young people starting businesses in
 4 pay attention to this situation." Chan said the government could look into whether other tax benefits could
 5 and innovation, other panellists said the government could do more to help Hong Kong businesses
 6 region. By contrast, Hong Kong lags behind. Our government should pursue a higher standard of education to
 7 River Delta development, said the Hong Kong government should take more initiative in the project. "The
 8 initiative in the project. "The issue is the government should be more proactive rather than wait to be
 9 needed for Greater Bay Area plan The Hong Kong government should improve tax policies to attract more
 10 such as health minister Dr Ko Wing-man. Government must move with the times if HK is to realise its

Figure 4. Sample concordance lines for *government/modal verb* in SCMP

After reading the frequent collocate of *work* (occurring 98 times, 0.11% in SCMP and 23 times, 0.06% in MDT), we find that MDT and SCMP suggest a dichotomy in people's attitudes toward work opportunities in other GBA cities. According to MDT, Macau residents are working and looking for new opportunities in Hengqin, a district of Zhuhai city neighbouring Macau, which implies their willingness in other GBA cities (see Extract 6). Yet SCMP indicates that young people tend to be reluctant to work in the mainland and other GBA cities (see Extract 7).

(6) MDT 21 January, 2022

In the future, many Macau residents will come to live and work in Hengqin, and it will be their new home.

(7) SCMP 27 February, 2019

But the federation's Youth Research Centre and Youth Ideas think tanks, which interviewed 522 Hongkongers aged between 18 and 39 last month, found the younger generation were reluctant to work in mainland cities.

Finally, the shared lexical word *competition*, occurring 36 times (0.10%) in MDT and 23 times (0.03%) in SCMP, diverges significantly in their representations. A semantic preference of various competing events in GBA has been shown through competitions such as *Vocational Skills Competition*, *Tourism Vocational Competition*, *martial art competition*, *Business Case Study Competition*, etc. (28 out of 36). However, in SCMP, *competition* suggests a competing situation in GBA. This situation is documented by *competition's* frequent collocate of qualifiers such as *vicious*, *fierce*, *increasing*, *severe*, *unnecessary*, etc. (10 out of 23), reflecting the fierce competition and people's negative attitude.

In summary, MDT reflects a positive emotional attitude and bright side toward the plan, whereas, SCMP tends to serve a sceptical attitude toward formulating and implementing the GBA plan with negative comments to the local government.

5.2 Macau Category

Macau tends to focus on GBA's construction, with keywords such as *promote*, *measure*, *cooperation*, etc., recorded to represent Macau's implementation of the GBA plan.

Development is the most frequent keyword in MDT (199 times, 0.55%). This item is typically preceded by *tourism* (15), *culture* (6), *economic* (5), *infrastructure* (3), etc. (52%, 35 out of 67), suggesting a state of well-rounded development in GBA.

The keyword *promote* appears 28 times (0.08%) in MDT, with the phraseology *promote/development* (9) being the most frequent. Noticeably, *development* is frequently preceded by *high-quality*, suggesting a semantic prosody for promoting high-quality development in GBA (56%, 5 out of 9). Other collocates of *promote* *exchange* (4), *infrastructure* (2), *industrialization* (2) and *innovation* (2) etc. demonstrate Macau's initiatives to join the GBA construction (see Extract 8).

(8) MDT 15 February, 2022

Li also stated that Guangdong will promote infrastructure connectivity and harmonize related relevant rules of Guangdong, Hong Kong and Macau, push ahead with a GBA connectivity initiative and enhance market integration.

Furthermore, the keyword *measures* (37 times recorded, 0.10%) in MDT indicates the relationship of actions between the GBA cities and Macau. After reading the concordance lines of *measures*, we categorized them into three groups: 1. measures to reduce the air pollutant emission, indicated by collocates such as *reduce emissions/pollutants, pollution limits*, etc. (7 out of 37), 2. specific measures announced by the Central government to benefit GBA (9 out of 37), and 3. measures for the sale of non-resident island by Guangdong Province (12 out of 37). We can see that both GBA cities and the central government have taken measures to facilitate the construction of GBA.

The keyword *cooperation* (appearing 87 times, accounting for 0.24% in MDT) has the most frequent semantic pattern *Cooperation Zone* (33 out of 87). This phrase stands for the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, showing a positive semantic prosody of the intensive cooperation between Guangdong and Macau. Through the instruction of building this cooperation zone, the collaboration and engagement between Macau and GBA is considered entering a new and exciting phase.

In addition to a state of collaboration, *innovation* (45 occurrences, 0.12%) shows another noticeable type of achievement in GBA, with *technology* (10), *technological* (4), and *centre* (7) being closely co-selected at N-1 and N+1. A semantic prosody of technology innovation trends in GBA has thus been indicated. Macau is also actively involved in the trend of innovation, leveraging the innovative resource from other city within GBA (see Extract 9).

(9) MDT 3 May, 2019

We need to learn from Shenzhen, welcoming more innovations to facilitate new and excellent customer experiences.

Finally, among the 106 occurrences of *new* (0.29%) in MDT, 53 of them are utilized as attributes to create the lexical patterns including *new development* (9)/*heights* (4) /*platform* (3), suggesting a positive semantic prosody of a brand-new and updated situation in GBA. Likewise, collocates of keywords *top* (28 times, 0.08%) and *major* (25 times, 0.07%) including *top choices/priority/concerns* (12 out of 28) and *major aims/objectives/duties/guidelines* (11 out of 25) signify the priority of GBA constructions, as the following extract indicates.

(10) MDT 13 April, 2021

Leung Chun-ying, vice chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, who is also chairman of the association, emphasized cross-boundary data as the top priority for the GBA integrated development.

In summary, the GBA plan is constructed as a major historic opportunity for Macau with solid recognition and the local government's proactiveness in promoting the GBA plan.

5.3 Hong Kong Category

Hong Kong's SCMP contains a much higher proportion of worry-related keywords. It is manifested that keywords such as *concern/concerns* (17 times), *worry/worries/worried* (15 times), and *fear/feared* (7 times) tend to provide an apprehensive attitude toward the GBA plan (see Figure 5). A reading of the concordance lines serves to create worries: 1. the worry of losing its autonomy (20%); 2. the fear of losing its competitiveness (28%). The keyword *risk/risks* (17 occurrences) further demonstrate a concern that Hong Kong's position being overtaken by Shenzhen, a neighbouring competitive city in finance and technology, as the following extract indicates.

1 nthony Neoh became the latest to join a chorus of **concern** that Hong Kong could lose its competitiveness unde
 2 egative impact, and 83pc cite it as their biggest **concern** this year Factory owners in the Greater Bay Area e
 3 said Beijing officials "clearly understood" these **concerns**, but that "the central government needs time to st
 4 to be unveiled next month. But it has also raised **concerns** that the strong push for growth in the southern pa
 5 d attractive to businesses," he said. Rather than **worry** about being surpassed by Shenzhen, he said, Hong K
 6 d be able to be transported easily." He dismissed **worries** that Hong Kong might lose its separate customs ter
 7 arrie Lam Cheng Yuet-ngor yesterday brushed aside **worries** that the city will lose its autonomy in planning a
 8 on hub rivalling Silicon Valley. "Some people are **worried** that the plan will affect the implementation of 'o
 9 ng a record for the biggest one-day turnover. The **fear** of missing out on the bull run also spilled over t
 10 n a key role in driving the project forward. Some **feared** that would put Hong Kong on a collision course w

Figure 5. Sample concordance lines for *concern*, *worry* and *fear* in SCMP

(11) SCMP 28 August, 2019

Some ask if Hong Kong may find itself frozen out of the plan and risks being eclipsed by Shenzhen...questions hang over Hong Kong's position in the GBA plan, with some believing it risks being sidelined if Beijing decides to bank on Shenzhen to ensure the project's success.

In addition, the keyword *lack* occurs noticeably, with its frequency reaching 19 times (0.02%) in SCMP. This item is followed by nouns such as *coordination*, *cohesion* (5), *job/job opportunities* (3), *access*, *channel*, *centralized platforms* (4) etc., indicating the specific deficiency and shortcomings. According to SCMP's journalism, the GBA lacks a centralized platform for spreading plan details. It is thus hard for people in GBA to comprehend the information, resulting in a failure to reach mutual recognition among the citizens. In addition, a lack of coordination is also noted in GBA (see Extract 12). The fierce competition in GBA cities and a mismatch of resources are recorded as the reason and embodiment of such shortage.

(12) SCMP 24 July, 2020

Competition in similar areas and a mismatch of resources are among the acute problems, and cooperation in innovation technology projects and investments is limited.

Apart from the external shortcomings in GBA, inner problems are also indicative through keyword *protests* (32 times, 0.03%). Hong Kong protests that commenced in June 2019 as a response to the Chinese government's proposal of a new extradition bill, which aimed to enable the extradition of fugitives to mainland China. This led to activist protesters advocating for democracy and engaging in confrontations with police (Zhang and Gu, 2022). In SCMP, *protests* are preceded or followed by phrases such as "*worst recession*", "*economic storm*", "*stuck in limbo*", "*made the city less attractive*" and etc., indicating the severe and adverse outcomes inflicted on Hong Kong (56%). The violent protests and destructive effects also raise worries and doubts about Hong Kong's future. Expressions such as: "*questions over Hong Kong's positions*", "*affect Hong Kong's role*" "*retain its role*", etc. (5 out of 32) suggest people's worry about whether Hong Kong's role in the GBA plan would be downgraded.

In view of the keyword *restrictions* (23 occurrences, 0.03%), it has an inclination to collocate with words such as *travel*, *Covid-19*, *coronavirus*, etc., forming a semantic preference of the pandemic-related restrictions (15 out of 23). Other collocated words like *homes* (17%), *trade* (13%), etc., explain the difficulties in buying houses and running businesses in the bay area. Similarly, the keyword *limited* (23 times, 0.03%) collocating with *resources/land/options/support*, etc. (43%) also indicates the shortage problems in GBA cities. With the inner protests and external constraints, a pessimistic attitude toward the GBA plan pervades Hong Kong, as Tam (2019) argues that "the city is going to have a rough ride realizing its role in the GBA project". Additionally, the keyword *difficult* (14 times, 0.02%), collocating with words and phrases such as "*access/invest/recruit talents*", "*see any way*", etc. (50%), indicates a hard time Hong Kong people faced under multiple challenges, as the following extract indicates.

(13) SCMP 28 January, 2019

Cheung Kei Group chairman Chen Hongtian...said last month that nearly half of them had faced difficulties because of the trade war, economic slowdown, a lack of access to credit and stricter regulations.

It is noted that SCMP makes a noticeable record of lack of resources, coordination and support under the GBA plan. And an apprehensive attitude towards Hong Kong's future is reflected through its representation of people's doubt and worry.

Above all, the shared frequent concgrams & words together with Macau and Hong Kong categories have revealed both similarities and differences regarding the GBA representations. The analysis of shared frequent categories

indicates that MDT and SCMP have shown common interest regarding the impact of the GBA plan, particularly in how it aligns with the “One Country, Two Systems” framework. When it comes to their preferential ways of imaging the GBA, the analysis of MDT and SCMP categories have shed more light on their differences. MDT focuses on the positive aspects of the plan, emphasizing cooperation and mutual development with the mainland. In contrast, SCMP expresses concerns, primarily about the potential loss of the city’s unique status and advantages under the plan. As for their attitudes toward implementing the GBA plan, the respective analysis for MDT and SCMP have uncovered Macau’s proactiveness in promoting the GBA plan. In contrast, Hong Kong’s complaints and doubtful attitude are recorded through its media coverage.

6. Discussion

Different media constructions between MDT and SCMP’s journalism confirm the dichotomy between views and values associated with Macau and Hong Kong. MDT holds a positive view on the GBA plan, regarding it as a new practice of “One Country, Two Systems”, while the SCMP has voices of doubt, suspecting that the GBA plan may jeopardize the principle of “One Country, Two Systems” and weaken Hong Kong’s independence as a special administrative region. Toward implementing the GBA plan, MDT’s journalism suggests Macau’s proactive image of implementing the plan, facilitating a well-rounded development of the plan. SCMP, on the other hand, indicates that the Hong Kong government lacks initiative in developing the plan. Under the challenges of protest and the pandemic, a pessimistic attitude toward the GBA plan permeates Hong Kong.

The reasons for the conflicting media construction in Hong Kong and Macau are multifold. Firstly, Hong Kong and Macau went through a different historical background of their press freedom and supervision, resulting in a divergent atmosphere of media criticism. Before the handover, the Hong Kong colonial government deliberately enhanced press freedom by abolishing the “Comprehensive Regulation of Publications Ordinance”, which laid the foundation for critical journalism and media watchdog roles (Zhang, 2012). In contrast, press freedom developed relatively late in Macau’s colonial government, with a strict censorship system in place until 1974, which prevented Macau’s media criticism (Ribeiro and Simões, 2021). After the handover, “a significant degree of press freedom is maintained in Hong Kong through the continual efforts of the professional journalists and resistance from the civil society” (Lee, 2015: 141), despite some indirect measures were taken by the Chinese central government to control the Hong Kong media (Chan et al., 2022: 45). The freedom thus enabled the Hong Kong media to provide critical coverage. On the other hand, Macau’s media freedom was constrained and limited (Kwong and Wong, 2017; Fraser, 2017). And Macau maintained a passive atmosphere and tradition of media criticism after the handover, which explained why we barely saw any critical comments on the GBA plan.

Secondly, socio-political context influenced the coverage of SCMP and MDT. In Hong Kong, there were two major political alliances, namely the pro-establishment camp and the pro-democracy camp, and they had evident differences and conflicts regarding political independence, breach of law, and anti-mainland sentiments (Zhang and Gu, 2022). In contrast, Macau society had much weaker political cleavages or noticeable confrontations. Therefore, Macau was regarded as the “good child” that listens to and complies with the mainland, while Hong Kong was considered the “bad child” with public protests and rebellion against mainland China (Ou and Sandel, 2021: 335-337). As Chan and his colleagues put it (2022: 158), “the macro socio-political context defines the impact that the mass media and the internet could exert”. Hence, under a “good child” context, Macau media believed that the integration process would boost the economy and considered it advantageous to promote such processes (Echevarría et al., 2022). Nevertheless, in the eye of the “bad child”, China’s integration process has and will continue to raise increasing worries about Hong Kong’s autonomy and threats to its uniqueness from mainland China (Ma 2015; Wong et al., 2016).

Thirdly, different economic and social situations affected Hong Kong and Macau people’s national identity, causing divergent emotional attitudes in their media construction. Yang (2014), a researcher on the post-colonialism of Hong Kong’s local consciousness, pointed out that in the face of various challenges, a collective often develops a nostalgic mindset. However, post-colonialism expands this sentiment, transforming it into a tool for rejecting and resenting reality (Yang, 2014). These years, Hong Kong has faced a series of challenges including the social-political protests in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic from 2019 to 2022, and declining international rankings across various sectors. Regarding its economy, the thirty-second edition of the Global Financial Centres Index has shown that Hong Kong’s rank of international financial centres dropped from the long-held third position to the fourth, surpassed by Singapore. With declining economic advantages and social challenges, there was a growing sense of disillusionment among Hongkongers. This frustration catalysed Hong Kong people’s local identity and an avoidance of the Chinese identity, which left a noticeably negative representation in SCMP’s journalism (Kwong and Wong, 2020; Wong et al., 2021; Zhang and Gu, 2022). In contrast, Macau has experienced rapid development and stable social order accompanied by the mainland (Ou and Sandel, 2021). According to the

statistics of the State Council of the People's Republic of China (2019), Macau's GDP has grown nearly eightfold since the handover. Now, under the outline of the GBA development plan, Macau actively facilitates the construction of the Guangdong-Macau In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin. Macau's national identity has heightened with the increased cooperation and reliance on the mainland, which is reflected through its positive representations in MDT's journalism.

More to the point, the foreign linkage associated with Hong Kong and Macau resulted in differential treatments of the GBA plan. The two special administrative regions have played different roles in connecting with foreign countries with Hong Kong as an international finance and logistics hub to enhance links between China and predominantly English-speaking Western regions, and Macau as an intermediary to bolster China's ties with Portuguese-speaking regions (Kwong and Wong, 2020). Compared with Macau, Hong Kong holds greater geopolitical significance for the US (Kwong and Wong, 2020). Therefore, the US provided more economic aid or assistance, trading opportunities, and military presence in Hong Kong to build a strong linkage (Grydehøj, 2020; Kwong and Wong, 2020). However, this linkage led some individuals to think that China is not the sole choice for Hong Kong's development, and it resulted in SCMP's critical journalism and tepid initiatives to integrate into the GBA. To a certain extent, some individuals in Hong Kong may even perceive the US government as a dependable partner (Garret, 2014). Nevertheless, Macau has experienced relatively weaker US presence with limited foreign linkages. Except for China, there seemed to be no other power to depend on to reach further development. In light of this, the GBA plan is a necessary and desirable option for Macau, which explains MDT's highlights to spur tighter embrace of the GBA plan.

7. Conclusion

The present study examines different media representations of China's GBA-related matters between Macau's MDT and Hong Kong's SCMP, and delves into the press freedom, socio-political contexts, national identity and foreign linkage associated with Hong Kong and Macau. The study suggests that the two media reach a consensus on the importance of GBA. However, they have competing constructions in implementing and evaluating the GBA plan. While Macau's press shows active involvement and great commitment to the plan, Hong Kong's press presents a passive attitude under it. By exerting the great potential of corpus approach, this study has demonstrated that phraseological analyses of frequent words, concgrams and keywords could provide convincing linguistic evidence to the study of China's GBA plan.

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations that should be considered. Firstly, due to resource constraints, the study could not extend its data collection beyond major newspapers, which may limit the variety of viewpoints included. Secondly, since the study was conducted within the context of two SARs, the findings may not be applicable to other mainland cities in the Greater Bay Area. We hope that the future research could seek to replicate the study with a more diverse sample of media outlets, and extend it to include other cities within the GBA.

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Authors' contributions

Zhide Hou and Keyu Chen were responsible for study design and revising. Chen drafted the manuscript and Hou revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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