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‘Ladders for climbing up or jumping off?’ On the interpretation of metaphors in political discourse in Hong Kong

Ariel Shuk-ling CHAN and Foong Ha YAP
Hong Kong Polytechnic University

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Objectives

- To explore how politicians make use of metaphors to address or frame social issues during the Legislative Council Election 2012.
- To explain the latent symbolic representations and concepts involved in these metaphors.
- To study how the symbolic representations of the same metaphor can sometimes be negotiated and reframed by the rivals.

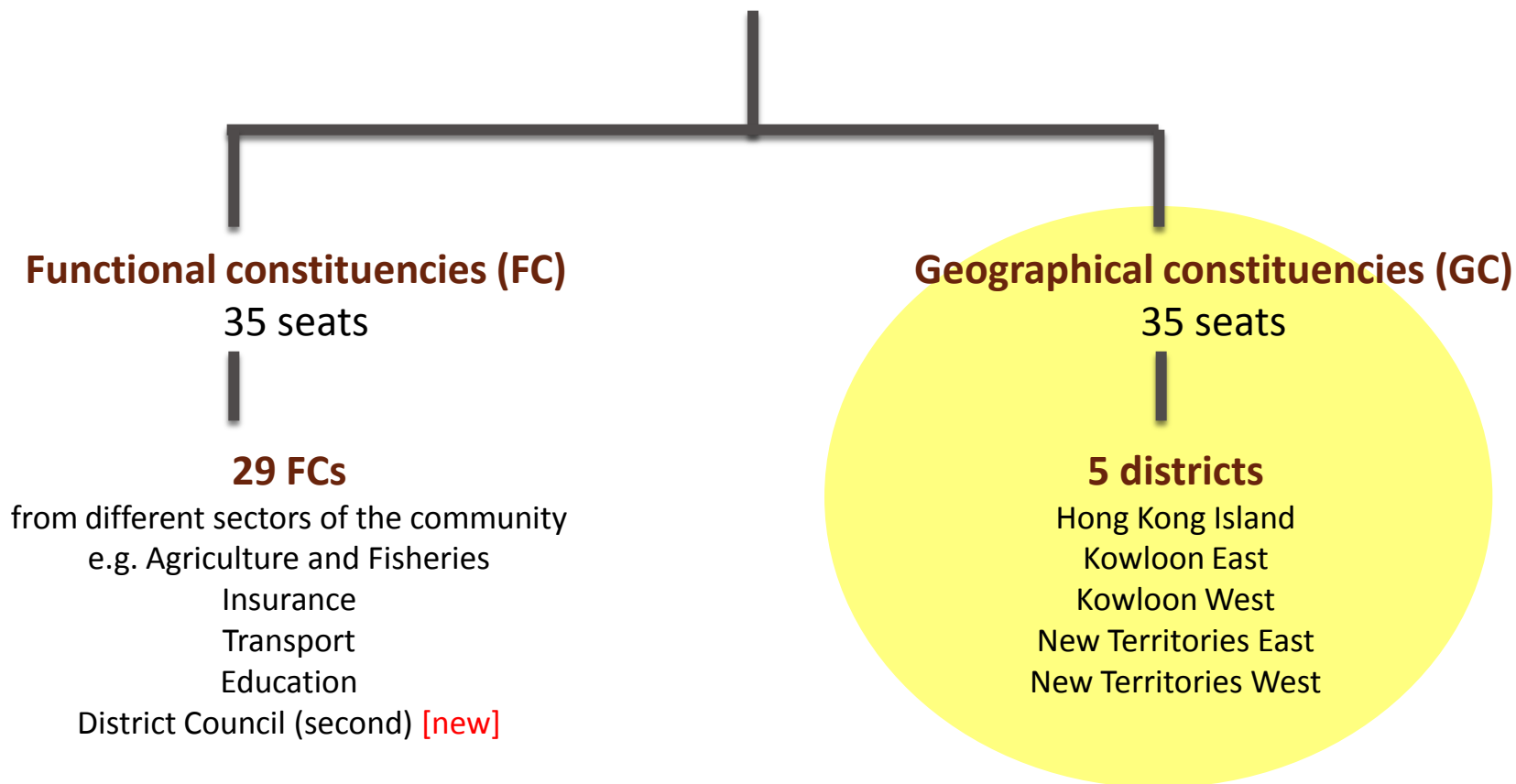
The socio-political background of Hong Kong

- Hong Kong is currently undergoing a vigorous **process of democratisation** that is highly publicised in the media.
- There has been a series of **controversial issues** in recent years:
 - e.g. 2010 political reform package
 - unauthorised building works of government officials
 - unpopular national education curriculum
- Street marches and protests highlighting a wide array of social issues
- The **rise** of many **new political parties** + **independent Legislative Council (LegCo) candidates**

Legislative Council of Hong Kong

Legislative council of HK

70 seats



Review on previous studies

Metaphors in Political Discourse

- Metaphors play an important role in political communication (e.g. Chilton and Ilyin 1993; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Mio 1997; Wilson 1990).

Functions of metaphors in political discourse

- To mitigate potential face-threats to oneself and the audience by using indirect verbal strategies when inviting the audience to form certain implicatures (Obeng 1997)
- To maintain one's positive face while denigrating one's opponent (Kuo 2003)
- To elicit absurd images → to ridicule one's political opponent (Wilson 1990)
- To break the rigid conceptual frames of an existing political order → to stimulate political thought and imagination (Chilton 1987)

Metaphor as a tool to address social issues

- Politicians often make use of metaphors to cognitively frame a social issue in the perspectives they favour, for example:
 - Immigration policy (Chartiers-Black 2006)
 - Foreign policy (Cilton and Lakoff 1995)
 - Security policy (Cilton 1996; Cilton and Ilyin 1993)
 - Racism (Van Teeffeln 1994)
 - Unemployment (Straehle et al., 1999)

Functions of metaphors in addressing social issues (Mio 1997)

- Breaking down complicated issues into simplified packets
→ more easily understood and thus pleasurable to the audience
- Evoking latent and implicit symbolic representations
→ making people accept an ideology as truth unconsciously or subconsciously
- Stirring emotion
→ blurring the boundary between logical thinking and emotional reaction, and between rational and irrational arguments

Specific research goals for this presentation

1. To examine the use of metaphors in addressing social issues or policies by LegCo candidates in the Legislative Council Election 2012.
2. Using the ladder metaphor as an example,
 - to illustrate how latent symbolic representations can be embedded in the metaphors dealing with social policies or issues.
 - to show how these symbolic representations can sometimes be negotiated and reframed by the rivals.

Data

- 2012 Legislative Council Election
- Televised debates held by Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK)
- Date: 18th August, 2012 – 1st September, 2012
- **Gift giving session (送大禮環節) inside the debate:**
Candidates can present gifts, either to the public or to particular rivals. Most of the candidates would make use of this chance to attack the opponents.

List of metaphors on social policies/issues found in the 2012 televised debates by Radio Television Hong Kong

Metaphor (Target domain, source domain)		Social issues being discussed
1	The Civic Party = the witch in Snow White	Social Security Allowance (SSA) for the elderly
2	Good progress of housing policy = ladder	Housing policy
3	Upward mobility = ladder	Upward mobility of the younger generation
4	Government's current stagnant housing policy = ladder	Housing policy
5	Children and youngsters in Hong Kong = blank paper	The national education curriculum
6	Super District Council = marsh	Super District Council
7	Pension and SSA = school hall and toilet	Social Security Allowance for the elderly
8	Supporting the Link REIT going public = a big present for Hong Kong people	The Link Real Estate Investment Trust (Link REIT) going public

D 民建聯
DAB

真誠在香港



社民連線

Ladder metaphor

DAB vs. LSD

Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong vs. League of Social Democrats



DAB 民建聯

- Chan Han Pan (CHP) 陳恒鏞
- The largest party in LegCo
- Centre-right
- Conservative
- Pro-Government
- Very pro-Beijing

3 ladder metaphors



Presents a ladder to the Hong Kong people, wishing them good prospects under the government's housing and youth development policies.

The 'ladder gift' is also used to ridicule the Democratic Party.

NTWest_47:52-48:24_ChanHanPan

01 CHP: 我哋 呢 今日 喺 呢一度 送 張 **梯** 畀
ngo5dei6 le1 gam1jat6 hei2 lei1jat1dou6 sung3 zoeng1 tai1 bei2
 1PL PRT today at here give CL **ladder** DAT

02 全港 嘅 市民。
cyun4gong2 ge3 si5man4
 all.Hong.Kong ATTR citizen

‘We are here today to present a **ladder** for all Hong Kong citizens,’

03 希望 呢 我哋 房屋 政策 呢 係
hei1mong6 le1 ngo5dei6 fong4uk1 zing3caak3 le1 hai6
 hope PRT 1PL housing policy PRT COP

04 有 房屋 嘅 階梯，
jau5 fong4uk1 ge3 gaai1tai1
 EXIST house ATTR ladder

05 令到 劏房 嘅 市民 呢 可以 快啲 上到 公屋，
ling6dou3 tong1fong2 ge3 si5 man4 le1 ho2 ji5 faai3di1 soeng5-dou2 gung1uk1
 make sub-divided.units ATTR citizen PRT can quickly enter-POT public.housing

‘hoping that our housing policy is the one that provides the solution (*lit. ladder*) for housing (problems),
 so that those who live in sub-divided units can **move into public housing estates more quickly.**’

- 06 小朋， 即係 後生 嘅 朋友 呢 可以 買得起 樓，
siu2pang4 zik1hai6 hau6saang1 ge3 pang4jau5 le1 ho2ji3 maa15-dak1hei2 lau2
 children that.is young ATTR friends PRT can buy-POT house
- 07 中產 呢 亦 都 唔 需要 做 房奴。
zung1caan2 le1 jik6 dou1 m4 seoi1jiu3 zou6 fong2lou4
 middle.class PRT also EMP NEG necessary do housing.slave

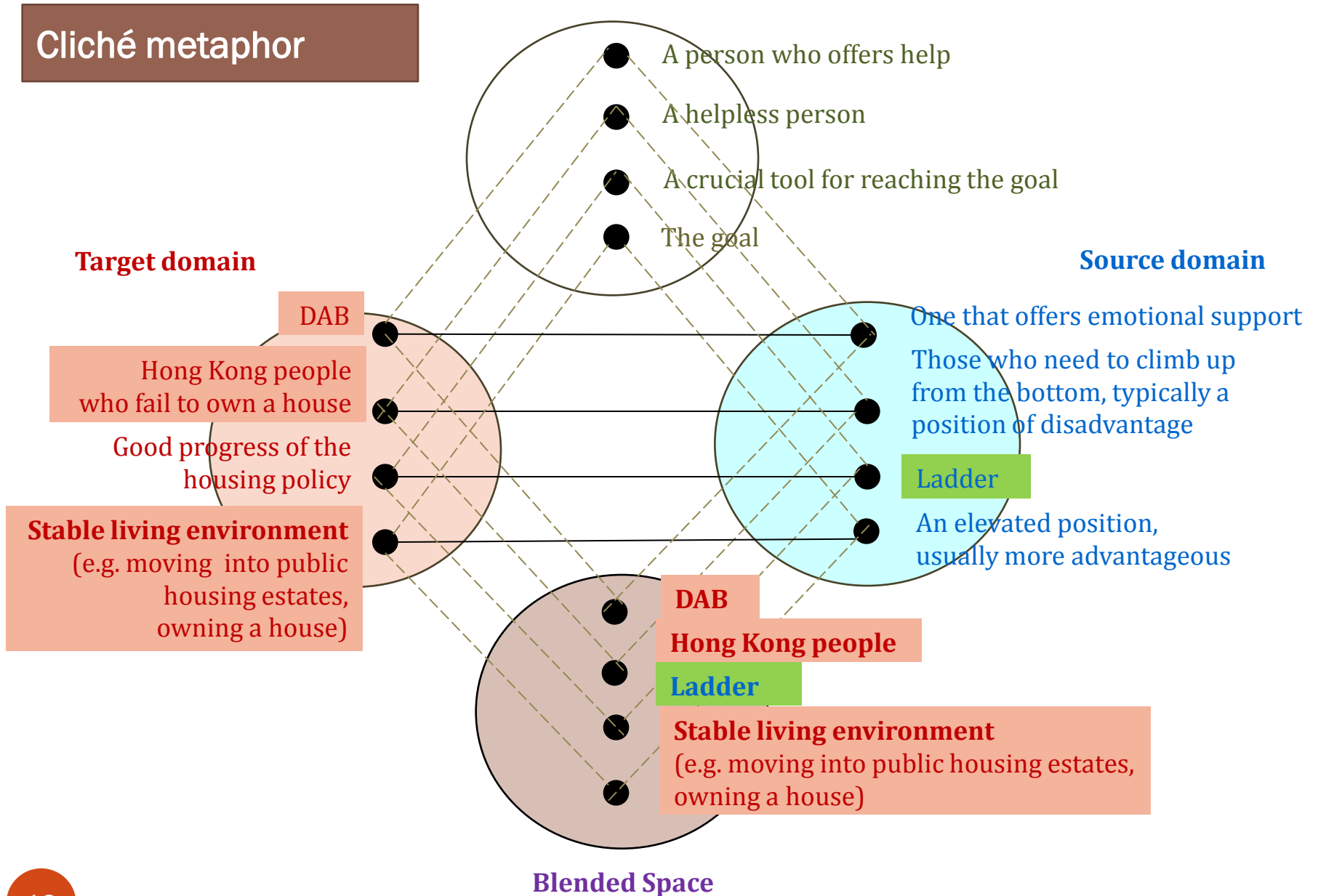
‘(We also hope that) the next generation **can afford to own a house**, (while) the middle class do not need to be the slaves of housing.’

Generic Space

Cliché metaphor

Target domain

Source domain



08 亦都 係 要 送 畀 全港 嘅 青年人，
jik6dou1 hai6 jiu3 sung3 bei2 cyun4 gong2 ge3 cing1lin4jan4
 also COP need give DAT all.Hong.Kong ATTR youngsters

09 希望 呢 大家 喺 置業、 學業、
hei1mong6 le1 daai6gaa1 hai2 zi3jip6 hok6jip6
 hope PRT everyone at housing.ownership studying

10 就業 同埋 創業 方面 呢，
zau6jip6 tung4maai4 cong3jip6 fong1min6 le1
 employment and start.up.business aspect PRT

11 有 一 個 向 上 流動 嘅 階梯。
jau5 jat1 go3 hoeng3 soeng6 lau4dung6 ge3 gaai1tai1
 EXIST one CL towards up mobility ATTR ladder

‘(I would) also give it to all youngsters in Hong Kong, hoping that **there will be a way** (*lit. ladder*) for **upward mobility** in terms of housing ownership, studying, employment and starting up businesses.’

Generic Space

Cliché metaphor

Target domain

Source domain

DAB

The younger generation in
Hong Kong

Upward mobility

Lower position in the
social hierarchy

Higher position in the
social hierarchy

One that offers emotional support

Those who need to climb up
from the bottom

Ladder

Lower rung of the ladder

Higher rung of the ladder

DAB

The younger generation in Hong Kong

Upward mobility = Ladder

Lower position in the social hierarchy

Higher position in the social hierarchy

Blended Space



Democratic Party 民主黨

- Third largest party in Legislative Council
- Centrist
- Pro-democracy
- **Constant internal strife** since handover in 1997
 - Discord between Young Turks (People advocating reform) and members from Meeting Point, who are considered as founding members of the Party
 - Members from Young Turks camp left the party one after another owing to their dissatisfaction of the party

12 更加 要 將 呢 個 禮物 送 畀
gang3gaa1 jiu1 zoeng1 lei1 go3 lai5mat6 sung3 bei2
 moreover need BA this CL present give DAT

13 民主黨 嘅 第三 梯隊 ，
Man4Zyu2Dong2 ge3 dai6saam1 tai1deoi2
 Democratic.Party ATTR third tier

14 希望 你哋 有 機會 (.) 可以 爬 上 嚟。
hei1mong6 lei5dei6 jau5 gei1wui6 ho2ji5 paa4 soeng5 lai4
 hope 2PL have chance can climb up RSV

‘(I) should also present this gift to (the members) of the third tier of the Democratic Party, hoping that you have a chance to climb up (i.e. enter the Legislative Council).’

Cliché metaphor

Generic Space

- A person who offers help
- A helpless person
- Means of improving the current situation
- The current problem
- The desired goal

Target domain

DAB addressing a rival party

Some junior members of the rival Democratic Party

Chances of improving their political standing

Currently with little political clout

Opportunity to win Legislative Council seats will be seen as a promotion

Source domain

One that offers emotional support

Those who need to climb up from the bottom

Ladder

Lower rung of the ladder

Higher rung of the ladder

Blended Space

DAB

Junior members of the Democratic Party

Opportunity to win LegCo seats = Ladder

Little political clout

Greater political clout

There is internal strife within the Democratic Party - Senior members in the party do not give chances to the junior members

DAB vs. LSD

Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong vs. League of Social Democrats

LSD 社會民主連線

- Tsang Kin Shing(TKS)曾健成
- Left-wing
- Pro-democracy
- Pro-labour



1 ladder metaphor

Mocking DAB by using the ladder metaphor but invoking a different source domain – the ladder as the jumping-site for suicides

Meaning: DAB is not helping HK people but sending them to death.



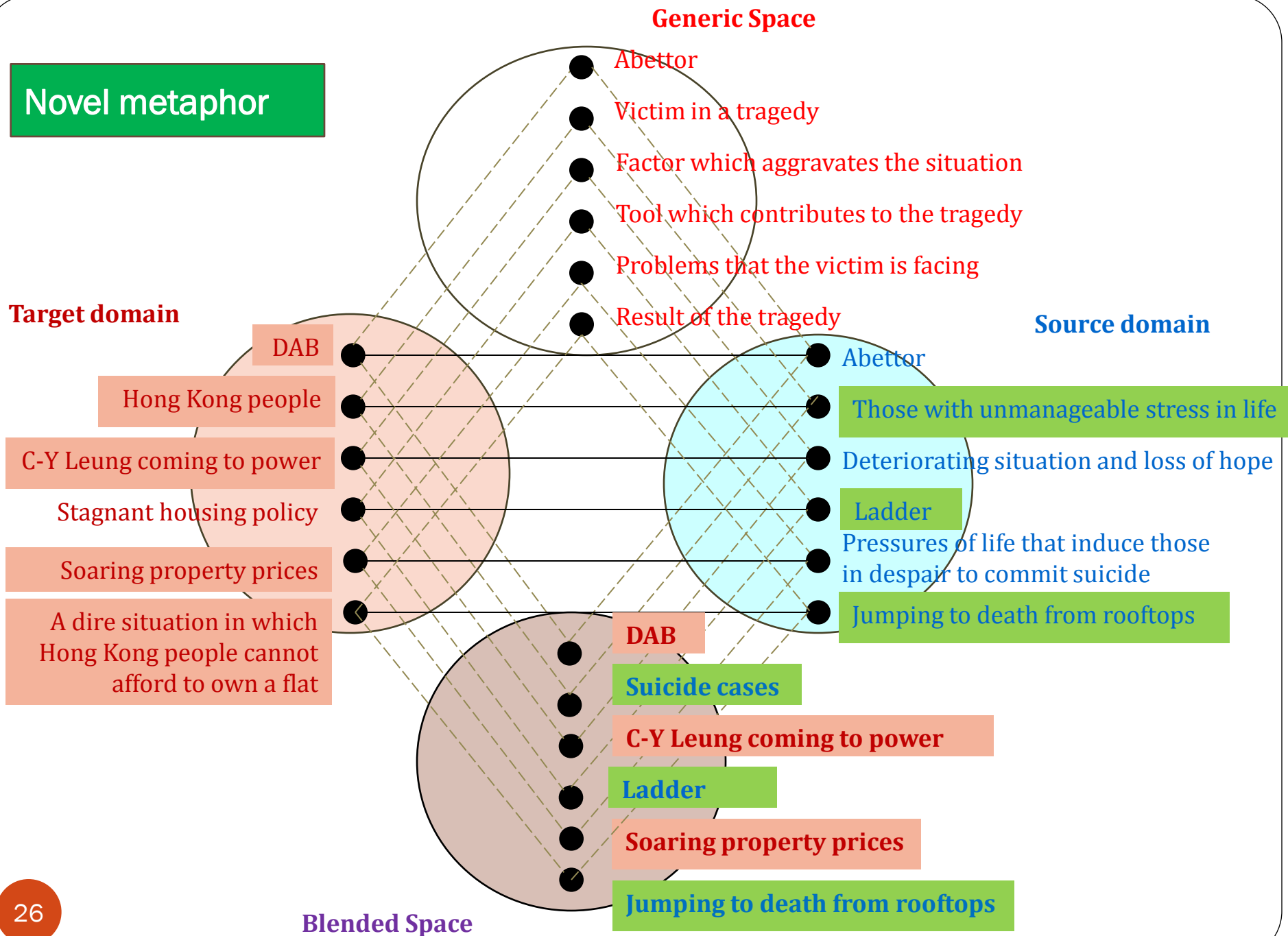


NTWest_48:24-48:36_TsangKinShing

- 01 TKS: 民建聯 送 呢 張 梯 呢
man4gin3lyun4 *sung3* *lei1 zoeng1 tai1* *le1*
DAB give this CL ladder PRT
- 02 係 逼 港人 呢 喺 天棚 擒 高一啲 跳 樓。
hai6 bik1 gong2jan4 *le1 hai2 tin1paang2* *kam4* *gou1jat1di1* *tiu3* *lau2*
COP force Hong.Kong.people PRT at roof climb higher jump.off.building
- 03 因為 梁振英 上場 之後 呢，
jan1wai6 *Loeng4Zan3Jing1* *soeng5coeng4* *zi1hau6* *le1*
because Leung.Chun.Ying come.to.power after PRT
- 04 樓價 再 升 多 一 成 。
lau4gaa3 *zoi3* *sing1* *do1* *jat1* *sing4*
housing.price again go.up more ten deci

‘DAB presented this ladder so as to force Hong Kong people to climb up higher and jump to death from the roof. It is because the housing price has gone up by ten percent since Leung Chun Ying came to power.’

Novel metaphor



Why ladder metaphors are employed?

A ladder is used to symbolise the following:

- (1) The progress of the housing policy (by Chan)
- (2) Upward mobility – career development opportunities for the younger generation (by Chan)
- (3) The current stagnant housing policy, which becomes a tragic inducement for some who despair to unfortunately end their life (by Tsang)

Why ladder metaphors are employed?

(contd.)

- **Simplifying complicated social issues**
 - Both housing and youth development problems are complex social issues which have been left unresolved by the previous government cabinet and remain as thorny problems for the current administration.
 - A ladder suggests an easy solution to these intricate issues
 - The current stagnant housing situation is due to numerous reasons
 - A ladder attributes the causes to a single origin – the government and its supporter DAB party

Why ladder metaphors are employed?

(contd.)

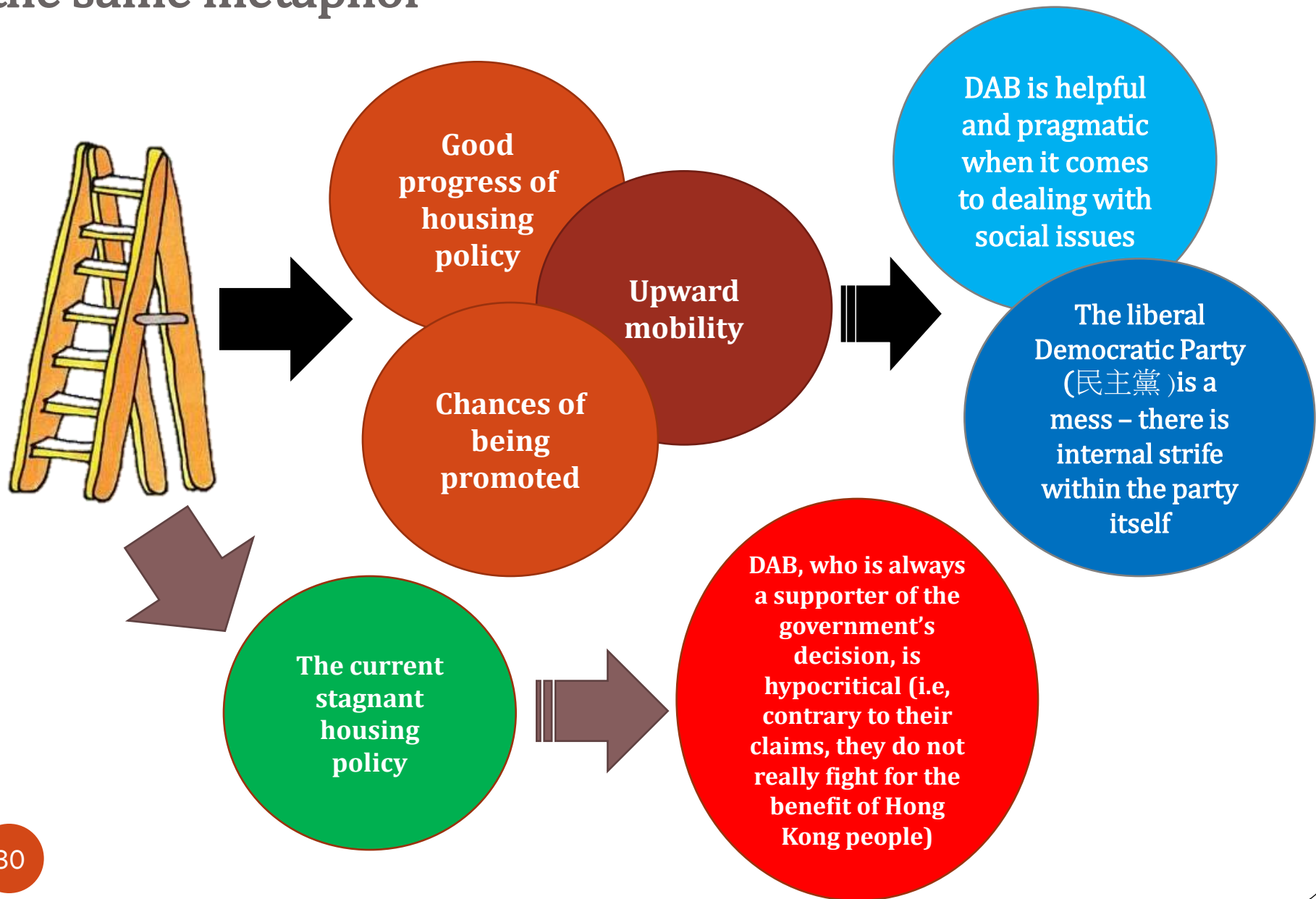
- **Increasing the feeling of familiarity**

- “Ladder as progress / upward mobility” = cliché metaphor
- Facilitates understanding of the audience, in which recognition subsequently brings pleasure, and thus, leads to persuasion (Freud 1905/1960).

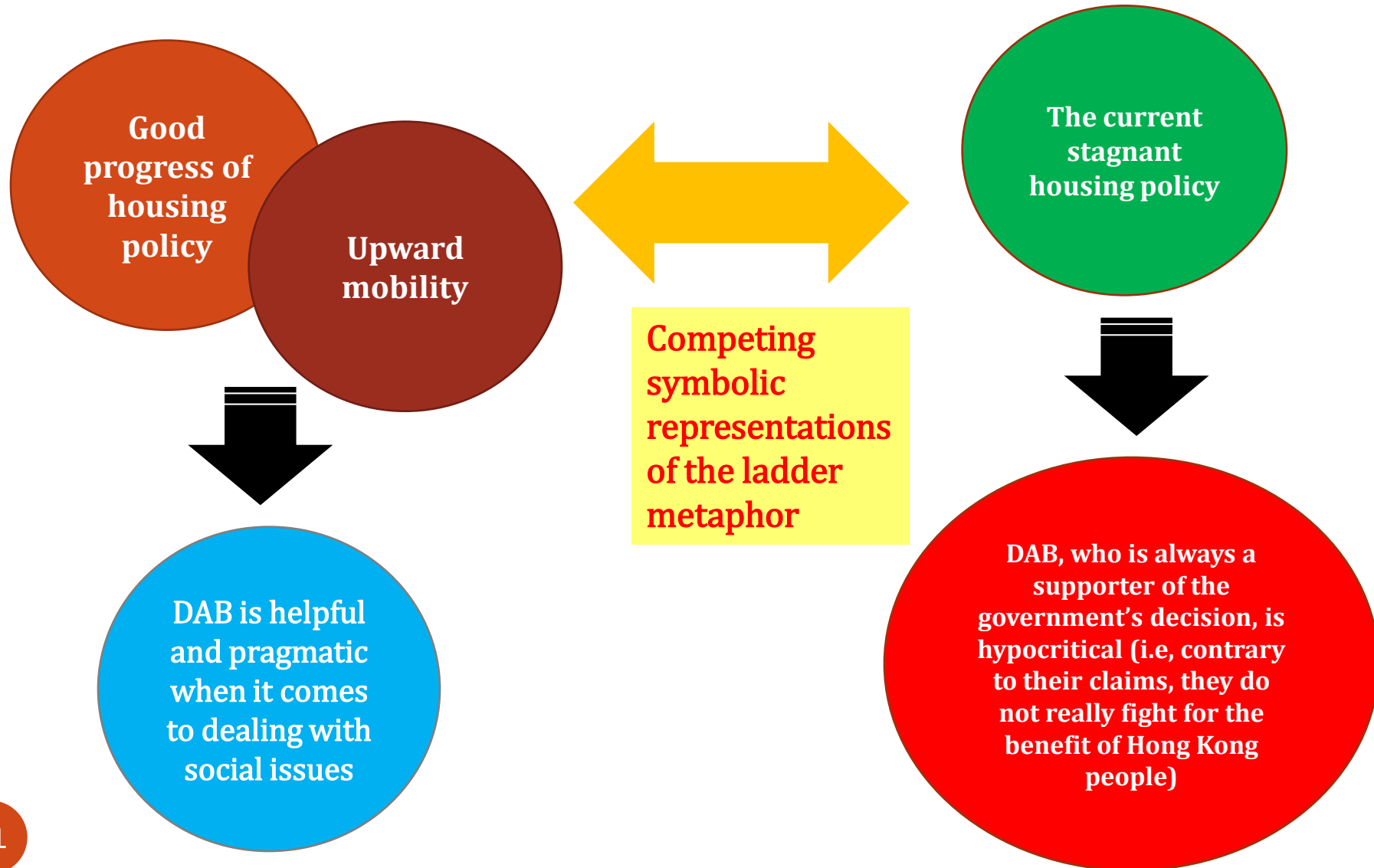
- **Embedding emotional incitement**

- “ladder as the current stagnant housing policy”: to force Hong Kong people to climb up higher and jump to death from the roof
 - To evoke fear and negative emotions from the audience.
 - Consistent with the findings of Mio (1997), this is to combine rational and logical arguments with the irrational and emotional ones.

Competing symbolic representations behind the same metaphor



Competing symbolic representations behind the same metaphor (contd.)



Conclusion

- Using the ladder metaphor as an example, we show how social policy metaphors are often used **to simplify the complex concepts** involved in socio-political debates.
- We also show how politicians use these metaphors **to make intangible ideas more understandable** to the general public, and also how these metaphors are also used **to embed emotional incitement**.
- Moreover, symbolic representations behind a given metaphor can be interpreted differently by different political parties and these different interpretations are then used to compete for the audience's attention.

Acknowledgement

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