Framing Migrant Workers: News Media and Discursive Construction of Citizenship in Transitional China

Dianlin Huang

BA
Qingdao University

MA
Communication University of China

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Faculty of Arts
Department of Media, Music, Communication & Cultural Studies
Macquarie University, Sydney
January 2012
Contents

Abstract i
Declaration ii
Acknowledgements iii
List of Figures iv
List of Tables iv

Chapter One Introduction 1

Chapter Two Media and Migrant Workers in Reforming China 14
  Reform and Social Transformation 14
  Great Changes 14
  Limitations of the Reform 19
  Media system: Change and Continuity 25
    Historical Legacies 25
    Change and Continuity in the Reform Period 30
    Approaches to the Media Institutions 36
  Internal Migration in the Reform Period 42
    Introduction 42
    State, Market and Migrant Workers in the Reform Period 44
  Summary 49

Chapter Three Citizenship, Public Deliberation and Discursive Contention 50
  Citizenship and Its Meaning in the Chinese Context 51
    Western origins 51
    Citizenship in the Chinese Context 56
  Public Sphere and Deliberation 67
    Public Sphere 67
    Democratic Deliberation 71
    Bridging the Two 75
    Deliberation with Chinese Characteristics? 79
  Media and Discursive Contention 83
    Media and Public Contention 84
    News Discourse and Framing Analysis 87
  Migration and Media Representation 94
    General issues in media and migration studies 94
    The Chinese Case 97
### Chapter Four  Framework and Methodology  103

- Research Questions and Framework  103
  - Research Questions  103
  - A Mutually-constitutive Framework  107
- Methodologies and Analytical Methods  112
  - Framing Analysis  113
  - Historical Institutional Analysis  120
  - Critical Analysis of News Discourse in the Press  123
- Case Studies and Process Tracing  134
- Methods of Data Collection  135
  - Sampling of Cases, Newspapers and Articles  136
  - Collection of Policy Archives and In-depth Interviews  144
- Summary  145

### Chapter Five  Ideological Remaking of Migrant Workers  147

- Historical Institutional Background  148
  - ‘Alliance of Workers and Peasants’  148
  - Marketization and Ideological Challenges of Migrant Issues  152
- Coverage on Migrant Issues in the People’s Daily  154
  - Party Press and the People’s Daily  154
  - A General Diachronic Description of the People’s Daily’s Coverage on Migrant Issues  156
- Changing Ways of Naming Migrant Workers  161
- Legitimizing Controllable Migration  168
  - Policing the ‘Waves’  169
  - A new Working Class in Discursive Making  177
- Summary  187

### Chapter Six  Contesting Hukou: Dialectics of Inclusion and Exclusion  189

- Political Economy of the Hukou System  190
  - Historical Origins of the Hukou System  190
  - Social Ramifications of the hukou System  193
- Discursive Contention about the Hukou System  197
  - Data Collection  197
  - Defining Hukou  200
  - Contesting Hukou Reform and its Relevance to Migrant Workers  207
- Summary  223
Chapter Seven  Discursive Construction of Migrant Citizenship: Case Studies  225
   Introduction  225
   Foxconn Suicides: Debating Factory Regime  229
      Introduction  229
      Framing Foxconn Suicides  230
   The Poor Second Generation: Contesting Migrant Children’s Education  245
      Introduction  245
      Media Coverage and Public Contention  247
   Grassroots Idols: Identity Construction and Cultural Practice  257
      Introduction  257
      Migrant Workers and Chunwan  259
   Summary  266

Chapter Eight  Conclusions  267

Bibliography  273
Abstract

Domestic migration in China, with massive multitudes of migrant peasant workers and the myriads of social challenges it has brought about, has received attention not only from the public and official policy bodies but also from various fields of academic concern, including migration and media studies. Starting from an interdisciplinary perspective, the topic of this PhD thesis is to examine the frames and framing process of issues regarding internal migrant workers by various major actors/organs - including the Chinese Party-state, market agents, intellectuals and specialists, social activists, media actors, migrant workers themselves and others - through power-laden discursive means in the media.

The main research questions ask how the Party-state has reconstructed and legitimized its definitions of differentiated citizenship categorizations in the reform period, in a form of rupture as well as continuity with the past revolutionary era; specifically how the elements of social exclusion and inclusion, identity, discrimination, deprivation, and oppressive apparatus, surrounding hukou (household registration system), the core institution of citizenship differentiation and social mobility control, have been rationalized and contested; regarding the concrete aspects of citizenship of migrant workers, including aspects of the civil, the social, the political and the cultural, how the different social actors, under the overarching supervision of the Party-state’s policies and ideological line, have interacted and contested the discursive boundaries of these issues, appealed to public resonance, and promoted their different interests, in a market-propaganda-driven media sphere. Through the case study of the migrant issue in China, the paper ultimately aims to examine the consequences of marketization without fundamental political changes in terms of public discursive contestation, and its meaning for citizenship conditions of marginalized groups in China.

Methodologically, a multi-level framework of analysis is adopted. First, a constructivist approach of framing analysis is used as a general means to structure the discursive contesting processes about several sub-issues of migrant workers. Second, a historical institutional approach serves as a contextualizing tool to locate all of these discursive struggles and specific discursive opportunities for different actors-speakers. Third, in terms of methods, critical discourse analysis of media texts and policy documents, and in-depth interviews with media practitioners and specialists of the field of migrant worker issues, are the two main techniques of data collection and analysing, penetrating case studies that focus on process tracing of several landmark social events about migrant workers in recent years. They will be used to examine the discursive structures and frames and the background information of these cases respectively.
DECLARATION

I certify that the work has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution. The work here is entirely my own, except where acknowledged.

Dianlin Huang
January 2012.
Acknowledgements

In no particular order, I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge my supervisors professor Naren Chitty and professor CHEN Weixing for their guidance, encouragement, insight and patience in the past three and half years.

Also I want to thank my dear friends and colleagues at Macquarie University, including Juan Carlos Valencia, Lilian Ji, Anne Pornpun Prajaknate, Wichian Hong Lattipongpun, Prithi Nambiar, Luc Lin, Ayako Ochi, Annekaryn Ranné, Ani Struppert, Leah Li, Viola Huang, and Xiaoguang Zhu, for their helpful suggestions, friendship, and company.

My friends Yanhuan Liu and his beautiful wife Sherry also deserve my thanks. I still remember the first day when I arrived in Australia. It was them who introduced the lovely city of Sydney to me.

Last but not least, I have to deeply thank my parents and my girlfriend Danqing, for their love and support.
List of figures

Figure 1.1 Migrant workers during chunyun, 1993, Chengdu - 3
Figure 3.1 Forum/Stadium model of public contention - 93
Figure 4.1 Analysis levels - 108
Figure 4.2 Faircloug’s approach to CDA - 125
Figure 4.3 A synthesized framework of CDA in this project - 127
Figure 5.1 Numbers of migrant-relevant articles in the People’s Daily before and after 2002 - 157
Figure 5.2 Annual numbers of migrant-relevant articles in the People’s Daily - 158
Figure 5.3 Annual numbers of migrant-related articles on first pages of the People’s Daily - 158
Figure 5.4 Coverage on major negative themes about migrant workers in the People’s Daily - 160
Figure 5.5 Coverage on major positive themes about migrant workers in the People’s Daily - 160
Figure 5.6 Comparison of usage of min’gong and nongmin’gong in the People’s Daily - 164
Figure 5.7 The State Council’s circular on tightening the control over rural migrants - 175
Figure 5.8 ‘Dagong is the most glorious!’ - 181
Figure 5.9 ‘Migrant workers smile after ‘blood and sweat money’ is claimed back’ - 186
Figure 6.1 Classification of the hukou system - 194
Figure 6.2 Percentage of migrant-worker related articles in hukou-relevant articles - 199
Figure 6.3 From urban and rural hukou to resident hukou: old wine in a new bottle - 213
Figure 6.4 ‘Accumulated points system’: a hurdle race - 221
Figure 7.1 Foxconn’s female workers at assembly lines - 240
Figure 7.2 Migrant children vs. local students with urban hukou - 251
Figure 7.3 Classroom of a migrant children’s school in Beijing - 254
Figure 7.4 Words from my heart: migrant children at the Spring Festival TV gala, 2007 - 260
Figure 7.5 Migrant duo: ‘If one day, I am old and lonely’ - 261
Figure 7.6 Migrant duo Xuri Yanggang at the Spring Festival TV gala, 2011 - 263

List of tables

Table 2.1 Numbers and growth rates of migrant workers and the urban employed - 45
Table 4.1 Major actor-speakers and constituencies in framing migrant issues - 117
Table 4.2 Levels of framing analysis - 120
Table 4.3 Samples of Newspapers - 138
Table 4.4 Methodology and Methods - 146
Table 6.1 Numbers of sampled articles about the hukou system - 199
Table 7.1 Numbers of selected articles relevant to case studies of migrant citizenship rights - 229