

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

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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.

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