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# Framing Chinese migrant workers: A comparison of media coverage in Mainland China and Hong Kong

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**Framing Chinese migrant workers:  
A comparison of media coverage in Mainland China and Hong Kong**

by

**Kejun Chu**

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
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Program of Study Committee:  
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2010

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the framing of Chinese migrant workers in articles published in two Mainland Chinese newspapers and two Hong Kong newspapers from 2004 to 2009. The content analysis reveals significant differences in the news frames between the two regions. Attribution of responsibility and morality are the most frequently used frames in Mainland newspapers, while human interest and responsibility frames dominate coverage in Hong Kong newspapers. Government officials are the most popular sources cited by the four newspapers, followed by migrant workers. Media in both regions portray this issue with a fairly neutral tone but have different attitudes towards the Chinese central government. Mainland news articles show a positive attitude, while Hong Kong journalists hold a neutral stance. The usage of frames, sources, and tone have changed over the six-year period examined. Possible explanations and implications of the differences in framing among Mainland and Hong Kong newspapers are discussed.

## Introduction

In many parts of the developing world, rural residents often give up farming and migrate to big cities to work in manufacturing, construction, and other industries. China is no exception. The term *migrant worker* is the result of the tide of internal migration in China. It refers to farmers or peasant workers who originally lived in the countryside but moved to the big cities in search of work.

This study compares the news coverage of Chinese migrant workers by four Chinese newspapers published in Mainland China and Hong Kong—*People's Daily*, *Southern Urban Daily*, *Wenwei Po*, and *Oriental Daily*—to examine how the public issue of Chinese migrant workers was framed from 2004 to 2009. The study examines these four newspapers because the issue of migrant workers is not merely important to Mainland China, but also matters in Hong Kong, especially to those who invest in export industry and hire migrant workers.

Since 2000, the Chinese press has been more attentive to the plight of migrant workers, especially during 2004-2009, when the Chinese government released policies concerning rural areas, farmers, and migrant workers. They bemoan their limited access to education and government services. The reports suggest that the migrant workers' social and economic status make them akin to illegal immigrants. Indeed, millions of farmers who have abandoned the land remain stuck at the margins of urban society. This phenomenon has led to numerous problems such as children left in rural households without parental supervision, rising crime rates, unemployment, and exploitative employer practices, e.g., the nonpayment of wages.

The recent global recession makes the lives of Chinese migrant workers even more difficult. Even though the nation of China is considered among the least affected, this is not

true for migrant workers who are the first victims of the economic downturn since many of them work in the export industry. On February 2, 2009, Xiwen Chen, Deputy Director of the Central Financial and Economic Leadership Group and head of the Central Rural Workers Leadership Group, announced that nearly 20 million migrant workers—15.3% of the total 130 million such workers—were out of jobs. Considering that six to seven million farmers are expected to join the urban work force each year, about 25 million farmers faced pressure to find jobs in 2009 (*Nanfang Weekend*, 2009).

Although the plight of migrant workers has received sporadic media attention, the way the media cover this topic can influence public perceptions of this issue and the required government response. It can be surmised that over the past 10 years, the way the media has portrayed this marginalized group has influenced the general public who barely has any contact with migrant workers. Because different news agencies may cover the same issue in different ways based on their reporting methods, organizational routines, organizational culture, and other factors, it can be assumed that audiences who rely on different media reports will form different opinions about the same issue.

This study aims to provide empirical support to the theoretical proposition that differences in media organization have a profound impact on the way important social issues are framed in the mass media. The study also attempts to help media practitioners realize that they need to know more about the living situation of migrant workers so that they could provide a more realistic image of migrant workers to general public. Furthermore, the research expects to help communication scholars realize the biases of Chinese language media and provide for comparison when they do similar research in the future. Hopefully,

the findings could assist policy makers get a better understanding their policies about the migrant workers issues are framed by the news media.

## Literature Review

### Internal Migration in China

The scale of internal migration in China increased immensely with the advent of the economic reforms in 1978 aimed at opening opportunities toward a more decentralized economy while also causing urban labor shortages (Davin, 1999). This was most obvious in major cities such as Beijing and Shanghai, as well as in the coastal export processing centers like Dongguan, where large numbers of migrant workers congregated.

In 1990, the Chinese government estimated there were 15 million migrant workers. This number grew to 40 million in 1999, 98 million in 2003, and has reached a high of 130 million today (*China's Employment Situation and Policies White Book*, 2004; *Nanfang Weekend*, 2009). Another unofficial report estimated the number of migrant workers at the end of 2005 at 200 million ("Chinese migrant workers investigate questions," 2006).

Two general categories of migrant flows exist in China. One involves a large number of short- or long-term migrations of people from the central and western areas to the more economically developed areas in the eastern part of the country, such as Guangdong, Shanghai, and Jiangsu province. The second category involves peasants migrating to the nearest rapidly developing local cities.

Migrant workers often find temporary employment opportunities in the construction and manufacturing industries; today, they constitute 90% of the labor force and are employed mainly in the construction industry (*China's Employment Situation and Policies White Book*, 2004).

Essentially displaced from their "official" areas of residence, the migrant workers do not belong to labor unions and have no protection from unjust labor practices. Because of

China's special household registration system (*hukou*), social welfare institutions do not officially recognize migrants as legitimate city residents. The government has introduced some small measures to protect migrant workers who flee to the cities where they labor under unfavorable working conditions and are underpaid.

Under pressure from residents, city governments have imposed measures meant to curb the waves of migration to urban areas. For example, the children of migrant workers are not allowed to be educated in city schools. As a result, children are often left to live with grandparents or other relatives in their local hometowns where schools are not generally known for the quality of instruction. Researchers report that about 58 million such children existed in 2007 (Chinese Women's Federation, 2008). To cope with this measure, some migrant workers pay a person, who is not always qualified to teach, to tutor their children at home so the family can remain intact.

Greater numbers of people returning home from distant places of work have taxed the public transportation system beyond its capacity, especially during festivities and times of celebration. For example, people traditionally go back to their home provinces to celebrate the Lunar New Year with their families. Migrant workers have to wait in bus or train stations for days to buy tickets for this occasion and are easy marks for scalpers. The migrant workers need friends in the transportation industry to help them secure tickets; otherwise they pay twice the regular price or even more.

Employers have been known to exploit discriminatory labor laws against migrant workers. They can, for example, make wage deductions with impunity, or worse, they can choose not to pay the workers at all, a practice that has earned public disgust. Migrant workers have no social security benefits, no health, retirement, work-injury, disability,

accident, or death insurance. The situation can be so dire that some, unable to cope, have even committed suicide. To protect workers' rights and to alleviate the condition, the Department of Labor and Social Security issued provisional regulations regarding the management of laborers from rural areas on March 7, 2006 (Xinhua News Agency, 2006). Still, some employers refuse to give the workers their due.

While in other countries the internal migration barriers are mainly attributable to historical/ethnic, social, and economic factors, in China the barriers are even stronger. They include legal and deep institutional roots—the hukou system (Chan, 1994), which made internal migration in China fit not only mainstream internal migration characteristics but also those of international migration (Chan, 1996b).

### **Media and Migration**

Migration and journalism are two highly interdisciplinary fields of study. Wood and King (2001) suggested that the media may intervene in the migration process and in the individual and collective experience of migration. The images of destination areas presented in the media help migrants make a decision whether or not to move to a particular city. The migrants' lifestyle also influences residents' attitudes toward their new neighbors.

According to Wood and King (2001), the largest volume of research on media/migration interactions is composed by the “representations of migrants, migration events and migration issues in print media” (p. 4). Immigration and racism have received intense coverage in most European countries (Solomos & Wrench, 1993; van Dijk, 1991). Similarly, media portrayal of Hispanics—especially Mexican and Latino migrants—in America also has attracted much academic attention.

A study of national network news by the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) indicated that immigration and crime have been the dominant topics for Latino stories over the past 10 years. Of 1,201 stories, these two topics accounted for 36% of the coverage (Branton & Dunaway, 2009). Similarly, of the 115 Latino-focused stories aired on the networks in 2004, 31 featured immigrants, including those involved in illegal border crossings. The NAHJ report concluded that “too often Latinos are portrayed as a problem people living on the fringes of U.S. society. Rarely do we see stories about the positive contributions of Latinos” (p. 294). Mexican immigrants are also portrayed as “national security threats” in American media (Nevins, 2002).

### **Framing Theory**

Goffman and Bateson introduced the concept of framing to social science in 1974, and it has become a very important theoretic approach in communication research. In 1990, the frame concept was given a more explicit definition in media studies (Entman, 1993; Reese, Gandy, & Grant, 2001; Tankard, Hendrickson, Silberman, Bliss, & Ghanem, 1991). According to Entman, the process of “framing involves selection and salience” (p. 52). This means that when reporting a story, journalists select some aspects of that story to highlight and thus—inadvertently or by design—make those aspects salient to readers. On the other hand, news frames also provide “a template that guides journalists in assembling facts, quotations, and other story elements into a news story, as well as orients the interpretations of the audience” (Han, 2007, p. 41).

To McQuail (2005), “framing is a way of giving some overall interpretation to isolated items of fact. It is almost unavoidable for journalists to do this and in so doing depart from pure ‘objectivity’ to introduce some (unintended) bias” (p. 379). Because

reporters decide what to report based on their perceptions of a topic's news value, they also have the privilege to choose how they should report on an issue by determining what is commonly referred to as the "news angle." Scheufele (1999) suggested at least five factors that potentially influence how journalists frame a given issue: (a) social norms and values, (b) organizational pressures and constraints, (c) pressures of interest groups, (d) journalistic routines, and (e) ideological or political orientations of journalists.

Entman (1993) argued that frames fulfilled four functions. They could (a) define problems, (b) diagnose causes, (c) make moral judgments, and (d) suggest remedies. Thus, one important application of media frame analysis is to examine how issues are presented in the news coverage (de Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001).

Tankard (2001) stated that news frames direct the idea for content and demonstrated that frames can be located in news text, headlines, photos, lead paragraphs, sources cited, quotes, logos, statistics and charts. Entman (1993), however, suggested that frames exist everywhere in the communication process—not only in the communicator and the message or text, but also in the receivers of the message and within the culture in which the message circulates. Therefore, how people come to understand the news has a lot to do with how the news was shaped or framed by the mass media (Scheufele, 1999).

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) quoted Neuman's definition of news frames as "conceptual tools which media and individuals rely on to convey, interpret and evaluate information" (p.94). They reviewed previous studies and summarized five generic frames:

1. the *responsibility* frame,
2. the *human interest* frame,
3. the *conflict* frame,

4. the *economy consequences* frame, and
5. the *morality* frame.

Each frame focuses on the party/individual who should be responsible for the cause or solution of the issue: the human face or emotional aspect of the individual story; the conflict between individuals or organizations; the economic consequences on individuals, groups, or countries; and “religious or moral prescriptions” (p.96). These five frames will be used as a basis for the current study.

### **Media Systems in Mainland China and Hong Kong**

In the current study, the four newspapers to be analyzed are published in Chinese and under similar social cultures. As such, their journalists are likely to share the same social norms. Mainland China and Hong Kong, however, have different political and media systems. Thus, the media in the two locations may differ widely in terms of the characteristics of their organizational culture.

In China, the news media are owned by either the central government or the state, are required to follow Communist party and government policies, and act as “the bridge between the party and the people” (Yin & Payne, 2004, p. 373). The government regulates the news media through the General Administration of Press and Publication of the People’s Republic of China. This agency has the right to issue or cancel news media licenses, establish press regulations and laws, and appoint or remove chief editors.

After the economic reform in 1978, China’s media have experienced an increasingly commercialization. Many media outlets have become or have attempted to become financially self-sufficient as the state cut funding to the media. Some were “transformed into state-owned corporate media groups with a wide range of commercial interests, generally

including both a major Party newspaper and others, more commercially focused” (Liebman, 2005, p.24). The Party relaxed its censorship on those non-purely state-run media, and thus these media could provide more mass-appeal content to please the audience so as to extend their market share.

In Hong Kong, the government-media relationship did not change dramatically after the reunification of China in 1997. Under the “one country, two systems” promise, Hong Kong is still a capitalist society, and the media are mostly privately owned. Wilkins (2008) stated that although the Chinese government let Hong Kong maintain existing broadcasting laws, which limited political authority over licensing, “it also moved to restrict peaceful protests and to control civic organization’s ties with foreign groups” (p. 65). Lee and Chu (1998) noted the Chinese government’s interest in keeping news coverage from supporting independent political interests within Hong Kong and Taiwan, potential subversion of Chinese communist authority, and personal attacks on Chinese figures. Lee (2001) suggested that these political concerns are managed within Hong Kong’s journalism through “strategic rituals (such as offering opposing points of view, both critical and supportive of Beijing); distinguishing editorials, which must not critique Beijing, from freelance columns, which may; and utilizing narrative forms that use conditional language and assert fact over opinion” (p. 65).

### **Hypotheses and Research Questions**

Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2005, 2006, 2008, 2009) conducted a series of studies to compare the coverage of the Iraq War and elections in the Swedish and U.S. media and found significant differences in terms of frame and source use. They suggested those differences could be explained by the different political and media systems. In the Iraq War study, they

found that the military conflict frame was more utilized by U.S. media, which is highly commercialized, while the responsibility and anti-war protest frames were used more by the Swedish media, where the dual media system exists and public and private media share the same importance. In the election study, they found that the U.S. media tended to treat politics as a strategic game and used more horse-race and political strategy frames, while the metaframe of politics as issues was more common in the Swedish media. These differences can be explained by the dissimilar political systems in the two countries.

**Table 1 Differences among Four Newspapers**

	<i>People's Daily</i>	<i>Southern Urban Daily</i>	<i>Oriental Daily</i>	<i>Wenwei Po</i>
Media ownership	Chinese government	Guangdong Province government	Private	Joint venture
Government involvement	High	High	Medium*	Medium
Media system	State-run	Commercial	Commercial	Commercial
Goal	Voice of government	Voice of government and Profit	Profit	Profit and Voice of government
Government relationship	Positive	Neutral	Neutral	Positive

\*Despite the diverse and independent press in Hong Kong and the assurances of “one country, two systems” after Hong Kong returned to PRC sovereignty in July 1997, Beijing curtails their freedoms to some extent.

In summary, different organizational structures, goals, modes of ownership, and policy could lead to differing media content (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Change in media ownership often brings different values, objectives, culture, and, ultimately, content.

Gilens and Hertzman (2000) compared the coverage of one aspect of the 1996 Telecommunication Act—the loosening of restrictions on television ownership—between

newspapers owned by companies that stood to gain from the relaxed restrictions and newspapers owned by companies that would not benefit from the same measure. They found that newspapers owned by those who would gain advantages from the Act offered their readers favorable coverage of the proposed changes, depicting positive consequences twice as frequently as negative ones. Newspapers that did not stand to gain from the Act were overwhelmingly unfavorable toward the initiative, with coverage containing more than 75% negative consequences. Their conclusions support the notion that the “financial interests of media owners influence not only newspaper editorials but straight news reporting as well” (p. 383).

It stands to reason, then, that newspapers owned by the government or by a private group will differ in many respects. Djankov et al. (2003) indicated that government ownership undermines political and economic freedom. Government-owned media usually emphasize public interest but not profit. For most media outlets that have to compete in the free market, economic profit is the primary goal. They try to attract more audience members who are later “sold” to advertisers. They allocate most of their space to serve the interests of those who have the ability to buy the advertised products. In China, the 20% of the population with economic or political power occupies 80% of the media time and space (Zhou & Yu, 2003). The result is that the majority of the population rarely gets representation in the media.

In Hong Kong, more than 20 of the total 50 newspapers are “popular press or tabloids, which lead circulation in Hong Kong and thrive on sensationalism, gossip, crime, and pornography” (Yin & Payne, 2004, p. 350). The average people get little representation either unless unusual things happened to them.

Tse, Belk, and Zhou (1989) indicated that commercialized media tend to use the human interest frame more than others. Their argument is applicable to our study, where the two commercial newspapers would be prone to use sensational news to attract more attention as the previous literature suggests.

Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) found that serious newspapers more often utilized the responsibility and conflict frames to present news, whereas sensational media relied more on the human interest frame. Disagreement and criticism of each other are the main parts in the conflict frame; such characteristics, however, are rare in the Chinese mainstream media (Liebman, 2005).

Considering the characteristics of the four newspapers being analyzed, we know that to attract more audience attention, the news media in Hong Kong are likely to report sensational stories with a higher degree of conflict, while media in Mainland China—especially the “high-ranking” Party media (Liebman, 2005)—are prone to pay attention to the macroscopic perspective of the whole migrant worker issue. Thus, we predict differences in the major frames utilized in the news media in the two regions.

**H1:** Human interest frame would be used more frequently in Hong Kong newspapers than in Mainland newspapers.

**H2:** Conflict frame would be used more frequently in Hong Kong newspapers.

**H3:** Economic consequence frame would be used more frequently in Hong Kong media.

**H4:** Responsibility frame would be used more frequently in the two newspapers in Mainland compared with those in Hong Kong.

**H5:** Morality frame would be used more frequently in the two newspapers in Mainland compared with those in Hong Kong.

**H6a:** The overall tone of the coverage in Mainland newspapers would be more positive compared with that in Hong Kong.

**H6b:** The coverage would be more positive in government-funded newspapers within each region.

**H7a:** The dominant tone toward the Chinese government would be more positive in Mainland newspapers than in Hong Kong newspapers.

**H7b:** The dominant tone toward the Chinese government is more positive in government owned newspapers within both Mainland and Hong Kong.

**Framing migrant workers in the Chinese media.** Studies that have examined the plight of migrant workers indicated that this marginalized group has been underrepresented and treated with prejudice in the Chinese media. Some claimed that media reports have constructed false realities around this group (Liu, 2008; Wan, 2006).

Studies have shown that media coverage of migrant workers always focuses on their identity as workers but not as citizens of a city (Wan, 2006; Wei, 2004). Li (2007) reported that the coverage of migrant workers usually includes the following eight topics: migration and management, crime, relationship with industry (difficulties in finding jobs and delays in the paying of salaries), relationship with cities (how migrant workers adapt to city life or how they change cities), relationship with their friends and relatives (children left behind in villages), daily life (sources of entertainment), and transportation during holidays (means of getting home and returning to the cities). Li also reported that although migrant workers'

relationships with industry receive a lot of attention, their relationships with people around them and their daily lives are rarely discussed. Such practices help create the image of migrant workers as a burden to society.

Wan (2006) reported that industry safety (physical harm to workers in unsafe working conditions) was the dominant topic employed by the *Lanzhou Evening News*. Social security, salary, and the protection of individual rights were commonly occurring topics. Jin and Mao (2007) found four other topics that were also common: (a) policy (such as migrant workers' medical care, housing, and insurance), (b) accidents (inside and outside the workplace), (c) protection of individual rights, and (d) social help. They stated that newspapers were concerned about migrant workers' employment, housing, medical care, social security, children's education, and skills training. The publications also spared no effort to report on salary issues, accidents, disasters, and crime. Issues such as cultural life and work safety were covered rarely, and migrant workers' physical and mental health and other daily life issues were practically ignored.

Previous researchers have already analyzed issues used to portray migrant workers. All of these studies, however, only focused on the media in Mainland China. Hong Kong, as a Specially Administrative Region of China, is closely tied to the economy and culture of Mainland China. To study how the media in Hong Kong frame migrant workers is also very important.

**Sources cited.** According to Beder (2004), the news is shaped by the people whom journalists choose to interview for research, quotes, and on-air appearances. To maintain objectivity, journalists try to strike a balance of opinion from all sides of an argument. In

China, however, most journalists tend to use as sources people from the mainstream establishment whom they believe have more credibility with their audience. Highly placed government and corporate spokespeople are the safest and easiest sources in terms of giving stories legitimacy (Entman, 1989).

Few quantitative studies about sources in migrant worker media coverage exist, however, and the findings are not uniform. The study of Chongqing newspapers showed that government sources were cited the most (41.7%), followed by nongovernment organizations and individuals (31.4%), and migrant workers themselves (17.4%) (Liu, 2008). In another study, however, Li (2005) found that migrant workers were the dominant source (48%), followed by government (40.2%). In Li's (2007) study, the percentage of migrant workers was even higher (over 60%), followed by government (28%).

Based on the limited number of previous studies, it was hard to predict the most frequently cited source; therefore, we developed the following research question:

**RQ1:** Which source is most frequently cited by the four newspapers when reporting about migrant workers?

In addition to the horizontal comparison of the four newspapers, we are also interested in how the frames, sources, and tone changed during the six-year period from 2004 to 2009. Thus, we pose the following four questions:

**RQ2:** How have the frames of coverage changed from 2004 to 2009 in the newspapers located in Mainland and Hong Kong?

**RQ3:** How have the sources of coverage changed from 2004 to 2009 in Mainland and Hong Kong newspapers?

**RQ4:** How has the general tone toward migrant workers changed in the coverage from 2004 to 2009 in Mainland and Hong Kong newspapers?

**RQ5:** How has the general tone toward the Chinese government changed in the coverage from 2004 to 2009 in Mainland and Hong Kong newspapers?

## Methodology

The current study examines the dominant frames used to portray migrant workers in the *People's Daily*, *Southern Urban Daily*, *Wenwei Po*, and the *Oriental Daily* to ascertain how these frames changed from 2004 to 2009. It also investigates the four newspapers' general attitude toward migrant workers by determining the tone or orientation of the stories toward this group. The study also examines the news sources used by the four newspapers and determines whether there is a pattern of source use over time.

### Research Design

To gather data for this study, a content analysis was conducted. This method is most appropriate for studies that aim to assess “the image of particular groups in society” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 143). Studies like these aim to: (a) assess changes in media policy toward these groups, (b) make inferences about the media's responsiveness to demands for better coverage, and (c) document social trends.

Two newspapers, *People's Daily* and *Southern Urban Daily*, were selected in Mainland China, and two others, *Wenwei Po* and *Oriental Daily*, were chosen in Hong Kong. The four newspapers were selected because of their importance and large circulations in each area. In 2009, the *People's Daily* had a circulation of 2,354,494 copies (Su, 2009). According to the Nielson Report (2009), the *Oriental Daily* published 1,762,000 copies in 2008, accounting for 33% of all newspaper market share in Hong Kong. The *Southern Urban Daily* is located in Guangdong Province where most migrant workers live. In addition, the newspaper is market-driven and has very liberal views. The Chinese central government is one of the stockholders of *Wenwei Po*, thus this newspaper resembles the Hong Kong newspaper, *People's Daily*.

The unit of analysis is the individual text news article, including editorials, opinion pieces, and so forth. The selection of news stories is achieved using the four newspapers' own online databases. The key term *migrant worker* (nong min gong 农民工) is used in all databases. The time frame of this study covers the publication period of January 1, 2004 to December 31, 2009.

In make sure all the articles focused on migrant workers, articles were filtered manually by the criterion that only articles with the key term *migrant worker* in either the title or leading paragraphs were selected after retrieving all articles from database.

To determine changes in coverage over time, a stratified random sampling procedure was used to choose an equal number of articles from each year. This method produced six strata. Within each year, each piece was numbered based on publication date. Then, a simple random technique was applied to get 50 articles from two newspapers in each location every year using a table of random numbers, thus a total of 600 articles were selected for analysis.

### **Coding**

The coding sheet starts with objective characteristics of articles: title of the publication, date of the publication, followed by the general tone, attitude toward government, frames, and sources.

*Tone* refers to the valence of the articles. The tone of a story can be positive, negative, or neutral. An article demonstrates a positive tone if it indicates support for migrant workers and the improvement of their condition. A story shows a negative tone if it reveals critical tendencies or assigns blame for the problems migrant workers may cause to the workers

themselves. A story exhibits a neutral tone when its stance toward migrant workers cannot be ascertained or when it shows no demonstrable attitude toward migrant workers. The number of positive, negative, and neutral tone stories was tabulated per year to determine whether dominant article valence changed over time.

*Attitude toward government* refers to the stance the articles hold toward Chinese central and local governments. The attitude can be positive, negative, or neutral. An article demonstrates a positive attitude if it praises the government or suggests that what government does is really helpful to migrant workers. A story shows a negative attitude if it criticizes or blames the government and individual government officials when they provide no effective measures to protect migrant workers or even threaten those poor people's rights. A story exhibits a neutral attitude when its opinion toward the Chinese government cannot be determined or when it shows no demonstrable attitude toward the government. The number of positive, negative, and neutral attitude stories was tabulated per year to determine whether dominant opinion toward government changed over time.

*Frames* refer to the overarching frameworks journalists use to structure a story. The textual frames was ascertained by analyzing the complete article asking three to five specific questions for each frame. The five generic frames and most of the measurements were adopted from Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) study. The original measurement of morality frame was not suitable for the Chinese situation, so we developed three new questions for that frame. Each question was coded on a presence/absence basis per news article: if present, coded 1; if absent, coded 0.

The *responsibility* frame focuses on the party/individual who should be responsible for the issue and is measured by five questions:

- Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem?
- Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?
- Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?
- Does the story suggest that an individual or a group of people in society is responsible for the issue/problem?
- Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?

The *human interest* frame focuses on the individual story and is measured by these items:

- Does the story provide a human example or “human face” on the issue?
- Does the story show or discuss how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?
- Does the story go into the personal or private lives of the actors?
- Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?”

The *conflict* frame emphasizes the discrepancy between people or organizations, and is measured by questions:

- Does the story reflect disagreement between parties/individuals-groups-countries?
- Does one party-individual-group-country criticize another?
- Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?”

The *economic consequences* frame stresses the monetary loss or gains. It is measured

by questions:

- Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?
- Is there a mention of the cost/degree of expense involved?
- Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?"

The *morality* frame focuses on the culture and social norms. It is measured by questions:

- Does the story mention customs or tradition differences between city and rural area?
- Does the story suggest some social norms that city citizens want migrant workers to follow?
- Are migrant workers being treated with dignity?

*Sources* refer to persons, agencies, or organizations cited in the story to provide background information, pertinent facts and data, and interpretation of events. Sources will be classified under the following categories:

- *Government officials, agencies, and those holding public office* (the Prime Minister, Mayor, officials in the Department of Labor)
- *NGOs* (local and international bodies such as the Greenpeace, 格桑花—a local Chinese NGO)
- *Scholars* (universities, research institutions, or individual researchers)
- *Migrant workers* themselves
- *Migrant workers' family members* (parents or children)

- *Employers* (owners whose factories hire migrant workers, managers, directors of human resource departments)
- *Others* (city dwellers, rural residents, farmers, and farmer groups)

The articles were analyzed based on the presence (coded 1) or absence (coded 0) of each of the sources above. The type of sources used was also tracked on a yearly basis to determine patterns of use over time.

### **Analysis Method**

Since the questions in each frame category were already proven reliable by Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) study, the value of each frame was calculated by averaging the corresponding questions. The possible values are: responsibility frame (0, 0.2, 0.4, 0.6, 0.8, 1); human interest frame and conflict frame (0, 0.25, 0.5, 0.75, 1); and economic consequence frame and morality frame (0, 0.33, 0.67, 1).

To examine the coverage difference between the Mainland and Hong Kong press, the mean of each frame and the presence proportion of each source type were compared using an independent-samples t-test while the tone and general attitude toward government were measured by chi-square test.

The ordinal logistic regression is the ideal model when interest variables are ordinal but the real distance between categories is unknown (Harrell, 2001). One way to deal with this kind of categorical variable is to treat them as if they are nominal or, alternatively, to treat them as interval variables. None of the methods, however, could provide complete information about the data. By using some transformation of the values (i.e., logit odds), the ordinal logistic regression could capture the extra information of the ordinal scale variables. The dependent variables in this study—frames, general tone, and attitude toward

government—are all ordinal variables. Therefore, an ordinal logistic regression model was used to examine the relationships between the dependent variables and the variables of time and location. Considering that binary logistic regression is identical to ordinal logistic regression when the dependent variable only has two levels, the associations between sources and time with region were measured by ordinal logistic regression.

To make the calculation easier, variable Year was recorded by 2004 (-5), 2005 (-3), 2006 (-1), 2007 (1), 2008 (3), and 2009 (5). A new variable was created by Region \* Time to measure the interactive effect of linear time and region. In case the association was not linear, a quadratic time variable was developed with the value (5, -1, -4, -4, -1, 5) and also the interaction effect of quadratic time and region (Region\* Quadratic Time). Under the model, Type 3 analysis of effects was used to determine whether the predictor variables year, quadratic year, region, and interaction were associated with the dependent variables; analysis of maximum likelihood estimates (MLE) was adopted to show the changes over time.

Let's use general article tone as an example. The tone variable has three values: 1 (positive), 2 (neutral), and 3 (negative). In ordinal logistic regression, the event of interest is observing a particular score and comparing whether the value is lower or higher. For the variable of tone, I modeled the following odds:

$$\theta_1 = \text{prob}(\text{score of } 1) / \text{prob}(\text{score greater than } 1)$$

$$\theta_2 = \text{prob}(\text{score of } 1 \text{ or } 2) / \text{prob}(\text{score greater than } 2)$$

The last category doesn't have an odds associated with it since the probability of scoring up to and including the last score is 1.

All of the odds are of the form:  $\theta_j = \text{prob}(\text{score} \leq j) / \text{prob}(\text{score} > j)$

The ordinal logistic model for a single independent variable is then:

$\ln(\theta_j) = \alpha_j + \beta_{1j} * \text{Region} + \beta_{2j} * Y6 + \beta_{3j} * Y8$  (Y6 denotes the variable time, Y8 the interaction term between region and time), where j goes from 1 to the number of categories minus 1. The value of  $\beta_j$  indicates the coefficient of the independent variable and tone when the score of tone = j, holding the other two variables constant.

Then  $\text{prob}(\text{tone } j) = 1 / (1 + e^{-(\alpha_j + \beta_{1j} * \text{Region} + \beta_{2j} * Y6 + \beta_{3j} * Y8)})$

Or  $\text{prob}(\text{score} = j) = \text{prob}(\text{score less than or equal to } j) - \text{prob}(\text{score less than } j)$ .

### **Inter-Coder Reliability**

According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), “inter-coder reliability refers to the levels of agreement among independent coders who code the same content using the same coding instrument” (p. 156). In this study, two graduate students, including the author, were trained to code for the variables. The two coders were trained to do the content analysis, and 90 articles were randomly selected from the total 600 articles to measure intercoder reliability. Cohen’s Kappa ( $\alpha$ ) was adopted to test the intercoder reliability and was estimated at an average of 0.91 for all categories.

$$\text{Kappa} = (\% \text{observed agreement} - \% \text{expected agreement}) / \{N * (\text{number of coders}) - \% \text{expected agreement}\}$$

For the reliability of each variable, please refer to Appendix II. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006), a Cohen’s Kappa of 0.75 or above demonstrates acceptable reliability in studies that deal with a number of nominal variables.

## Results

This chapter presents the results as they relate to the hypotheses and research questions for this study. First, it provides the descriptive results for each frame based on average frame scores. Next, the overall tone of news coverage, the attitude towards the Chinese government, and the use of sources are presented in the form of means for each variable, frequency, and percentage. Then the associations between the four types of dependent variables and two independent variables, region and time, are examined using Ordinal Logistic Regression.

### Frames

By comparing the mean value of each frame, the study suggests that responsibility (M=0.406, SD=0.257) and morality (M=0.270, SD=0.262) frames dominated the coverage in the Mainland newspapers (see Table 2). In other words, the newspapers in Mainland China focused on the government policies or regulations towards migrant workers, saying that the government needs to take care of them and respect them. When central and local governments had meetings, government officials were often quoted as saying, “Migrant workers are very important labor force in our country, and they are also our brothers and sisters. We need to care of them” (*People’s Daily*, 2005 Jan 17).<sup>1</sup> Human interest (M=0.403, SD=0.278) and responsibility (M=0.386, SD=0.287) frames were the top two frames adopted in the Hong Kong media by providing a human example or “human face” on the issue related to migrant workers and discussing the rules adopted by Chinese government. The conflict frame was rarely used in the Mainland and Hong Kong media, indicating lack of

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<sup>1</sup>The second most used frame in *Southern Urban Daily* was human interest frame (M=0.271, SD=0.335), closely followed by morality frame (M=0.269, SD=0.268).

disagreement or criticism in the coverage. The few times when the conflict frame was used were when the coverage was about crimes committed against migrant workers and about their unfair treatment. One example is that in Shanxi province, the owner of a brick furnace in Hongdong County kidnapped 33 migrant workers from other states such as Henan and forced them to work about 20 hours every day while only giving them two pieces of steamed bread as meals (*Wenwei Po*, 2007 June 19). The coverage reported that they even kidnapped children and disabled people to work for them as slaves; one person was beaten to death because he tried to escape. The reporter here criticized these monstrous actions and the local government.

**Table 2. Frames Used in Mainland and Hong Kong Newspapers**

<i>Region</i>	Mainland		Hong Kong			
<i>Frame</i>	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	T-test	DF
Responsibility	0.406	0.257	0.386	0.287	0.899	598
Human Interest	0.230	0.317	0.403	0.278	-7.126**	598
Conflict	0.115	0.234	0.074	0.188	2.356*	598
Economic Consequences	0.206	0.333	0.221	0.328	-0.576	598
Morality	0.270	0.262	0.159	0.178	6.087**	598

*Note: \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01*

The first hypothesis predicted that human interest would be more frequently used in Hong Kong newspapers. The results show that Hong Kong newspapers (M=0.403, SD=0.278) indeed used more human interest frames than Mainland media (M=0.230, SD=0.317). An independent-samples t-test shows that this difference was statistically significant ( $t=-7.126$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $df=598$ ). The first hypothesis is supported.

The second hypothesis expected that the Hong Kong newspapers would use the conflict frame more often. On the contrary, the results suggested that newspapers in Mainland China used the conflict frame more frequently ( $M=0.115$ ,  $SD=0.234$ ) than those in Hong Kong ( $M=0.074$ ,  $SD=0.188$ ), and those difference were statistically significant ( $t=2.356$ ,  $p=0.019$ ,  $df=598$ ). This hypothesis is rejected. According to the second analysis run within region, the two market-driven newspapers, *Southern Urban Daily* and *Oriental Daily*, tended to use more conflict frame than *People's Daily* and *Wenwei Po*, respectively.

The third hypothesis forecasted that the Hong Kong newspapers utilized more economic consequence frame. The economic consequence frame, however, was similar in the newspaper coverage between the two regions, Mainland ( $M=0.206$ ,  $SD=0.333$ ) vs. Hong Kong ( $M=0.221$ ,  $SD=0.328$ ). In addition, the t-test could not prove the significance of the little difference. Thus, this hypothesis is rejected.

The fourth hypothesis predicted that the responsibility frame would be more common in Mainland newspapers than in Hong Kong newspapers. As Table 2 shows, the mean values were high in both the two locations, Mainland ( $M=0.406$ ,  $SD=0.257$ ) vs. Hong Kong ( $M=0.386$ ,  $SD=0.287$ ). There were no significant differences, however, between Mainland and Hong Kong media in terms of the responsibility frame. Thus, this hypothesis is not supported.

The fifth hypothesis foresaw that the morality frame would be more common in Mainland newspapers. It was indeed more common in Mainland media ( $M=0.270$ ,  $SD=0.262$ ) than in Hong Kong media ( $M=0.159$ ,  $SD=0.178$ ). The independent-samples t-test shows that this difference was statistically significant ( $t=6.087$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $DF=598$ ). Thus, this hypothesis is supported.

## Sources

The first research question inquired about the most frequently used news sources. In each article, the following six sources were coded based on presence/absence: government officials, experts, NGOs, migrant workers, family members, and employers. Other sources that appeared in the news coverage were documented. It is worth noting that sources were not regularly used in either the Mainland or the Hong Kong press. Some articles did not cite any people at all, while some used different kinds of sources. For example, in a report about online discussion on the development plans in Guangdong province, one government official, one migrant worker, one manager of a real estate firm, one CEO of a toy factory, a university professor, and some net citizens were cited (*Southern Urban Daily*, 2009).

**Table 3. Sources Used in Mainland and Hong Kong Newspapers**

	Mainland	Hong Kong	T-test	DF
Official	98 (32.7%)	136 (45.3%)	-3.202**	598
Expert	19 (6.3%)	27 (9%)	-1.127	598
Migrant Worker	61 (20.3%)	46 (15.3%)	1.600	598
Employer	21 (7%)	24 (8%)	-0.464	598
NGO	3 (1%)	7 (2.3%)	-2.401*	598
Family	3 (1%)	1 (0.3%)	0.711	598
Lawyer#	2 (0.67%)	0 (0.0%)	1.417	598
Total	207	241		

*Note: \*p<0.05, \*\*p<0.01*

*#Developed from the "other" category*

The descriptive statistics show that sources were used 207 times in Mainland articles and 241 times in Hong Kong articles. In the Mainland press, government officials were the most cited source type (98, 32.7%), followed by migrant workers (61, 20.3%), employers (21, 7%), experts (19, 6.3%), NGOs (3, 1%), family members (3, 1%), and lawyers (2, 0.67%). In the Hong Kong news coverage, official sources also dominated the coverage (136, 45.3%),

followed by migrant workers (46, 15.3%), experts (27, 9%), employers (24, 8%), NGOs (7, 2.3%), and family members (1, 0.3%). The source pattern was similar in both regions except for the fact that the Hong Kong press relied on government officials as sources more frequently and also cited from NGOs several more times. The results were supported by an independent-samples t-test measuring the proportion difference: government officials ( $t=-3.202$ ,  $p=0.001$ ,  $DF=598$ ) and NGOs ( $t=-2.401$ ,  $p=0.017$ ,  $DF=598$ ).

### **Valence**

Hypothesis 6a predicted more positive coverage in Mainland newspapers. Newspapers in the two locations shared a similar pattern in terms of general story tone. The majority of the coverage was neutral in valence, with 136 (45.3%) neutral stories in the Mainland versus 160 (53.3%) in Hong Kong. Newspapers in the Mainland reported 120 (40%) positive stories while the media in Hong Kong only covered 75 (25%) positive stories. The remaining were negative stories: 44 (14.7%) in the Mainland press and 65 (21.7%) in the Hong Kong press. The neutral stories often comprised coverage about government meetings, policies, or statements of some government officials to express their opinions on the migrant worker issue. Much of the good news was about the government helping migrant workers to get back their wages. In summary, the Hong Kong newspapers provided more neutral and more negative news to the public, whereas the press in the Mainland carried more positive news. The chi-square test confirms that the differences in tone were statistically significant ( $\chi^2=39.973$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $df=598$ ). (See Table 4.) Thus, this hypothesis is supported.

The second part of the sixth hypothesis expected more positive coverage in government funded newspapers within the two regions. In Mainland, 48.1% of the coverage in *People's Daily* was positive and 41.7% was neutral, while 49.3 % neutral stories and 31.3%

positive stories were published in *Southern Urban Daily*. The chi-square test indicated these differences were significant ( $\chi^2=10.574$ ,  $p=0.005$ ,  $DF=2$ ). In Hong Kong, the majority of the coverage in both newspapers was neutral, *Wenwei Po* (54.3%) vs. *Oriental Daily* (49.1%). *Wenwei Po*, however, contained more positive coverage (28.3% vs. 9.4%) and less negative coverage (17.4% VS. 41.5%) than the *Oriental Daily*. The chi-square test confirmed the difference was statistically significant ( $\chi^2=18.158$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $DF=2$ ). Thus, the hypothesis is supported.

**Table 4. General Tone and Attitude toward Government**

		Mainland	Hong Kong	Chi-square	DF
Overall Tone	Positive	120 (40%)	75 (25%)	39.973**	598
	Neutral	136 (45.3%)	160 (53.3%)		
	Negative	44 (14.7%)	65 (21.7%)		
*Attitude toward Chinese Government	Positive	121 (53.5%)	65 (26.1%)	77.638**	598
	Neutral	83 (36.7%)	178 (71.5%)		
	Negative	22 (9.7%)	6 (2.4%)		

*Note:* \*Articles that did not mention the Chinese government were excluded. The percentage is based on the rest of stories.

\*\* $p<0.01$

### Attitude to Government

Hypothesis 7a predicted that more a positive attitude toward the Chinese government would be expressed in Mainland coverage. The descriptive statistics show that 74 (24.7%) articles did not talk about or mention the government in Mainland newspapers, while 51 (0.17) did not do so in the Hong Kong media. In total, 226 stories from the Mainland media and 249 stories from the Hong Kong media were analyzed. Over half of the news coverage of migrant workers in the Mainland newspapers displayed a positive attitude (121, 53.5%) to government, followed by neutral (83, 36.7%), and negative (22, 9.7%). The opinion on

Chinese central and local government in the Hong Kong newspapers was mostly neutral (178, 71.5%), followed by positive (65, 26.1%), and negative (6, 2.4%). The difference in attitude between Mainland and Hong Kong media was statistically significant as indicated by the chi-square test ( $\chi^2=77.638$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $DF=598$ ). Thus, this hypothesis is supported.

Hypothesis 7b predicted that government owned newspapers would hold a more positive stance towards the Chinese government within each region. In Mainland newspapers, 62.1% of the coverage in *People's Daily* expressed a positive attitude toward the government, while there were 43.1% positive stories in *Southern Urban Daily*. The chi-square test showed a significant difference ( $\chi^2=8.093$ ,  $p=0.017$ ,  $DF=2$ ). In Hong Kong, the majority of the coverage in both newspapers held a neutral stance toward government. The positive stories accounted for 30% of the coverage in *Wenwei Po*, whereas only 8.9% of the coverage in *Oriental Daily* was positive. The counts of positive and negative stories in *Oriental Daily* were lower than five, thus chi-square could not be applied to compare the difference.

### **Time Trend**

An ordinal logistic regression model was used to examine how time and region influenced the four dependent variables under investigation: frames, general tone, attitude toward government, and sources. Type 3 analysis of effects (Table 5) was applied to examine whether time was significantly related to frame use.

The second research question asked how frames changed along with time in Mainland and Hong Kong news coverage. The results presented in Table 5 show that the human interest frame and morality frame both have linear and quadratic relationships with time, while conflict frame time was only linearly associated with time, holding the other variables

constant. Unfortunately, the responsibility frame and economic consequences frame could not fit in this model. To illustrate this trend, Figure 1 and Figure 2 are presented to show how the mean value of each frame changes during the six years under investigation.

**Table 5. Effects of Year and Region on Media Frames, Valence, Attitude and Sources**

	Effect	Wald Chi-square	DF
Responsibility	Region	0.555	1
	Time	0.246	1
	Quadratic Time	0.506	1
	Region*Time	1.294	1
	Region*Quadratic Time	0.065	1
Human Interest	Region	68.658**	1
	Time	17.238**	1
	Quadratic Time	1.148	1
	Region*Time	7.503**	1
	Region*Quadratic Time	2.145	1
Conflict	Region	4.837*	1
	Time	3.663*	1
	Quadratic Time	0.045	1
	Region*Time	1.192	1
	Region*Quadratic Time	7.614**	1
Economic Consequence	Region	0.722	1
	Time	0.634	1
	Quadratic Time	1.965	1
	Region*Time	2.907	1
	Region*Quadratic Time	0.860	1
Morality	Region	26.527**	1
	Time	3.399	1
	Quadratic Time	22.525**	1
	Region*Time	0.122	1
	Region*Quadratic Time	15.519**	1
Tone	Region	15.455**	1
	Time	1.626	1
	Quadratic Time	1.209	1
	Region*Time	0.357	1
	Region*Quadratic Time	5.596*	1

**Table 5. (Continued)**

Attitude	Region	2.327	1
	Time	1.268	1
	Quadratic Time	0.194	1
	Region*Time	4.787*	1
	Region*Quadratic Time	4.523*	1
Official	Region	10.095*	1
	Time	2.102	1
	Quadratic Time	1.665	1
	Region*Time	0.09	1
	Region*Quadratic Time	1.742	1
Migrant Worker	Region	2.504	1
	Time	6.353*	1
	Quadratic Time	1.95	1
	Region*Time	0.22	1
	Region*Quadratic Time	1.777	1

Note: \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$

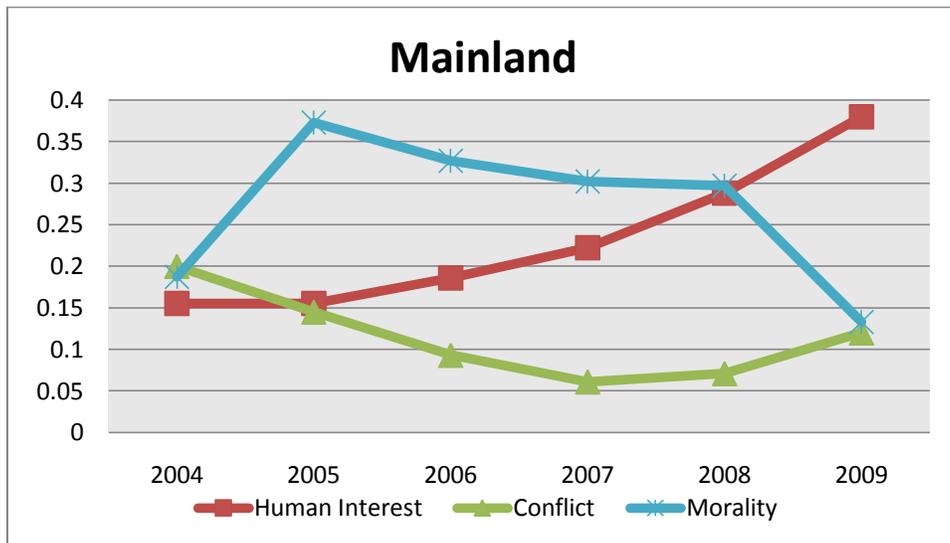
\*\* Other sources have too few counts, and could not be analyzed here.

In the Mainland press, the human interest frame usage increased steadily over time, following a linear trend. The conflict frame and morality frame both have quadratic shapes, as shown in the figure below, but follow a decreasing trend overall over the six years. The use of conflict frame spiked in 2007 in the Mainland newspapers. In Hong Kong newspapers, the usage of all three frames did not change much during the six-year period. The use of the human interest frame went up slowly and kept dominance. The conflict frame and morality frame also present quadratic shapes but only with very tiny changes.

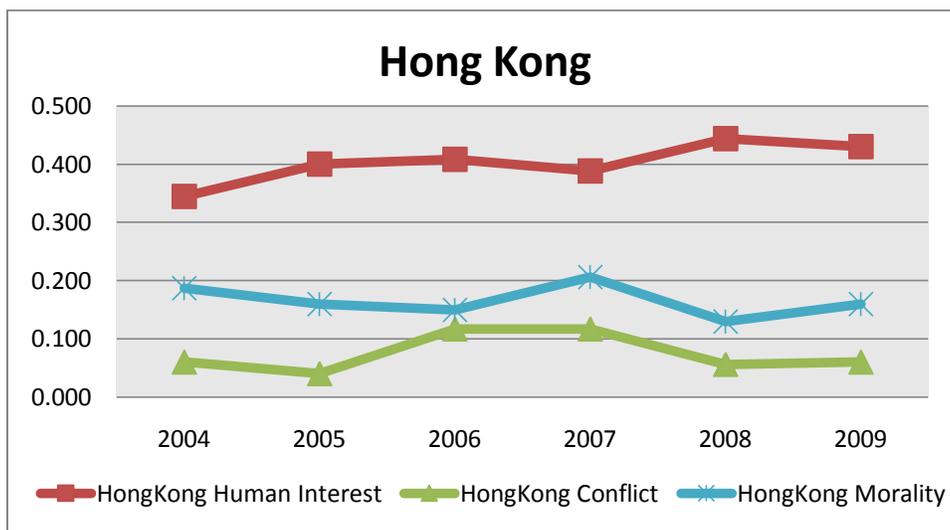
The third research question asked how the citation types changed over time. Only government official and migrant worker sources, however, have enough counts to be analyzed to see the time effect. The ordinal logistic regression results show that time had no linear or quadratic effect on the changes of government official source but migrant worker source when holding other variables constant. The overall trend of using migrant workers as

a source is growing with fluctuation, especially in the Hong Kong media. The citation of migrant workers in Hong Kong coverage bottomed out in 2007, as did the usage of the conflict frame. (See Figure 3.)

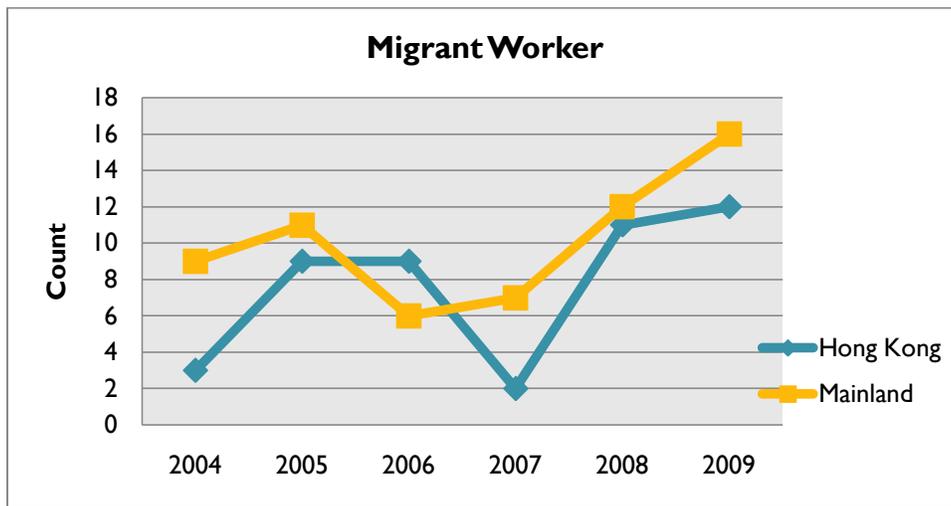
**Figure 1 Frames over Time in Mainland China**



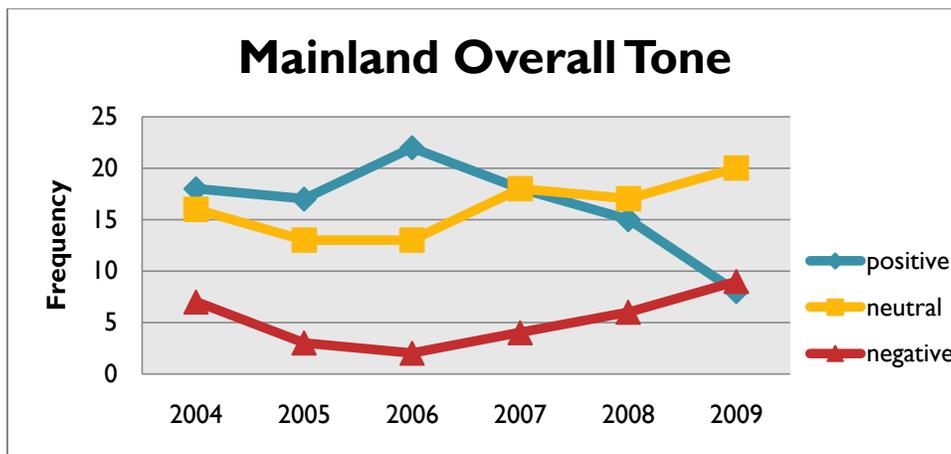
**Figure 2 Frames over Time in Hong Kong**



**Figure 3 Migrant Workers as Sources over Time**



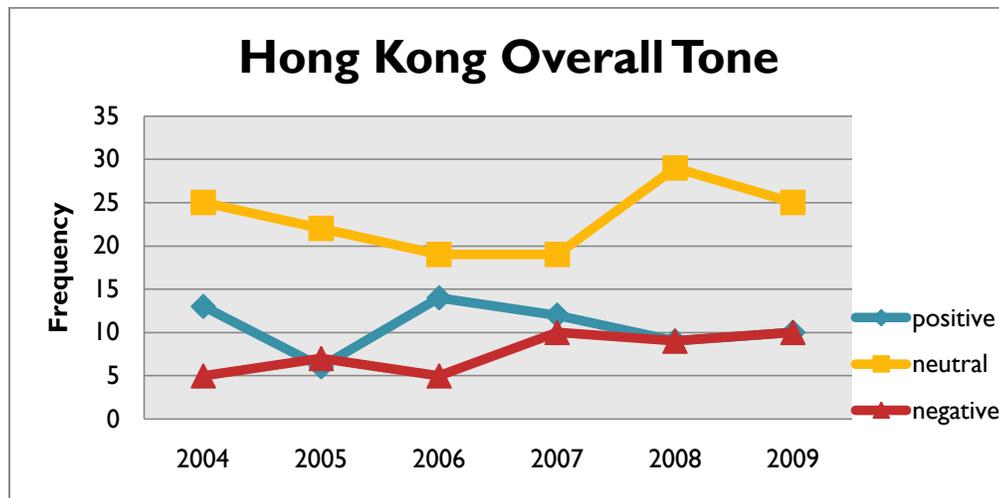
**Figure 4 General Valence over Time in Mainland China**



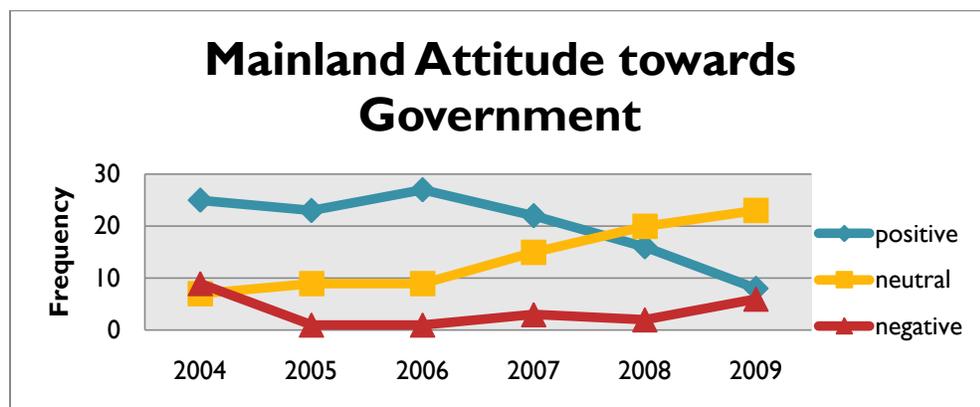
The fourth research question was asked to determine the trend of general story valence. The ordinal logistic regression results show that only the interaction of quadratic time and region could influence the tone proportion. In Mainland newspapers, the neutral coverage was rising slowly over time. The positive and negative stories have the opposite trend; the former dropped dramatically after 2005, while the latter climbed steadily after

2005. In the Hong Kong press, only the negative coverage increased a little bit, while the other two types fluctuated but without much changes from 2004 to 2009.

**Figure 5 General Valence over Time in Hong Kong**



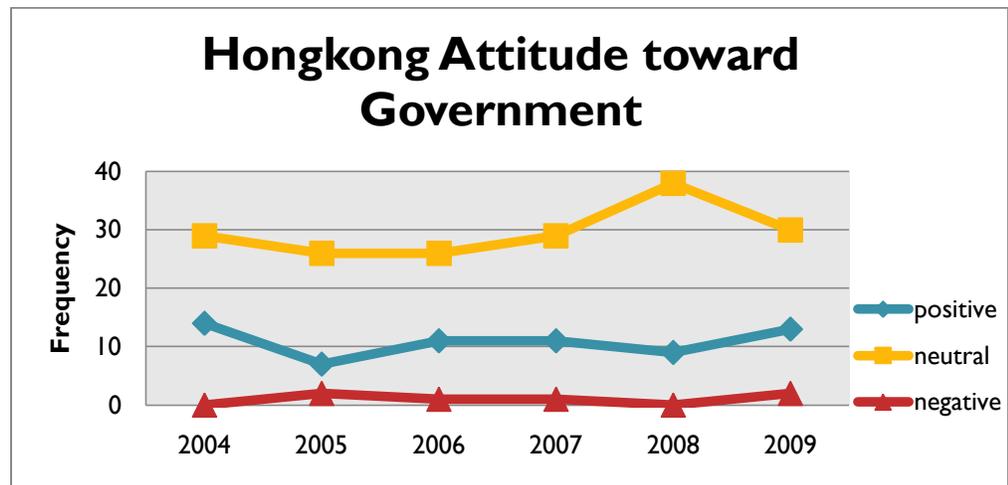
**Figure 6 Attitude toward Government over Time in Mainland China**



The fifth research question asked how the attitude toward government changed over the six years. Similar to the results of the sixth question, only the interactions of time (both linear and quadratic) and region influenced the attitude toward government. In the Mainland media, similar to the general valence, the positive attitude descended after 2006, while the

use of neutral tone increased. In the Hong Kong newspapers, the number of neutral stories was much higher along the six years, and the pattern remained the same over time.

**Figure 7 Attitude toward Government over Time in Hong Kong**



### Summary

To summarize:

- The first hypothesis was supported. The human interest frame was used more frequently by the Hong Kong newspapers.
- The second hypothesis was not supported. On the contrary, Mainland media employed the conflict frame more frequently.
- The third hypothesis was not supported. No statistical differences were found in the use of the economic consequences frame between the two regions.
- The fourth hypothesis was not supported. There was no significant difference in terms of the responsibility frame.
- The fifth hypothesis was supported. The morality frame was more common in Mainland media.

- Both parts of the sixth hypothesis were supported. More positive coverage was found in Mainland newspapers; in addition, the government funded newspapers within each region provided more positive stories compared with the market-driven newspapers.
- Hypothesis 7 was supported. The Mainland newspapers hold a more positive stance, and the Hong Kong newspapers prefer a more neutral stance. Furthermore, the government owned newspapers, *People's Daily* and *Wenwei Po*, expressed a more positive attitude toward the Chinese government than the market-driven newspapers.
- The first research question asked about the most dominant sources cited. Government officials and migrant workers are the top two sources in both Mainland and Hong Kong media.
- The second research question asked about the changes of frames over time. The results suggest the human interest frame, the conflict frame, and the morality frame fluctuated significantly during the six years.
- The third research question was about changes in source use over time. Only the use of migrant workers as sources increased significantly over time.
- Similar results were found for the fourth and fifth research questions. Only the interaction of time and region seemed to influence the two dependent variables: general tone and attitude toward government.

## Discussion

Considering the large number of migrant workers in China and the role they play in the daily life of the whole country, the migrant worker issue does not matter to only a limited group of people. It is indeed a social problem in China and “means a lot to the social stability and economic development of China,” as the Premier Wen Jiabao said (*Southern Urban Daily*, Jan 20, 2006). Media studies of news production and news content show that there are only a limited number of media frames that dominate the coverage of social issues (Cohen, 1981; Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978). This was indeed the case in the news coverage of migrant workers in both the Mainland and Hong Kong press.

### **Framing of Migrant Workers in Chinese Mainland Newspapers**

The content analysis revealed that the responsibility frame was by far the most frequently adopted frame when Mainland newspapers talked about migrant workers. The morality frame was the second most common. The human interest frame and economic consequences frame had similar shares, and the conflict frame was rarely present. From 2004 to 2009, the No.1 white paper issued every January in China was about the policies and measures the Chinese government would undertake to solve the problems of farmers and migrant workers. The government realized the importance of the issue and began to provide solutions. They took this as their responsibility and primary task and paid close attention to this group of people. As Shoemaker and Reese (1996) suggested, the selection of frames is a corollary of the political orientation of mass media and the work norms of journalists. It is no wonder that the two newspapers in the Mainland tended to follow the frames put forth by the government—namely, the responsibility frame and the morality frame.

In 2003, Premier Wen Jiabao helped a migrant worker named Xiong Deming get back her owed wage; he has worked for the protection of migrant workers ever since. Every local government was asked to investigate whether migrant workers were getting paid and, if not, pay them using funding provided by the central government. During 2003 and 2004, stories about the amount of money being used to pay migrant workers were very common in newspapers. The high media exposure led to more attention to this group; as a result, the state government has introduced more policies on social insurance and compulsory education to aid the conditions of migrant workers. One example is the introduction of the first train specialized for migrant workers in Beijing on Jan 14, 2005 (*People's Daily*, 2005). The morality frame usage in the Mainland media peaked in 2005 but after that gradually declined.

There was little focus on attribution of conflict, addressing the disagreement between migrant workers with others or criticism of groups involved. In 2007, only seven articles of the total 50 stories we selected in Mainland news were about conflict or problems encountered by migrant workers. The news media continued focusing on what the government did or they suggested needed to be done about this social problem and their statements would rarely contain conflict or disagreement. That year, the presence of the conflict frame dropped to the bottom in the Mainland coverage.

We, however, cannot neglect to note the effort of the Mainland media to capture more personal stories. The use of the human interest frame increased steadily over time, but it never surpassed the dominance of the responsibility and morality frames in the Mainland coverage.

### **Framing of Migrant Workers in Hong Kong Newspapers**

Insofar as the Hong Kong media ecology is dominated by the “businessmen-acquired professional press,” to attract attention and boost market share through sensationalism is their primary goal (Robert, 2003). Human interest stories are best to trigger readers’ emotions. In Hong Kong, this type of stories leads the coverage about migrant workers. A report in *Wenwei Po* on Nov 7, 2007, for example, was about a crime toward 40 migrant workers in Inner Mongolia, the journalist described the injury of one worker in gruesome detail: serious skull fracture, brain hemorrhage, surgical removal of the skull fragments of nearly 7 cm in diameter and so on. Most of the Hong Kong story samples were chosen from *Wenwei Po*, which is owned mainly by the central government. A possible reason that the responsibility frame was also very common in Hong Kong news could be that the *Wenwei Po* did this to please the authorities.

In general, the Hong Kong news media frequently reported on crime and personal accidents that happened to migrant workers in 2006 and 2007. Some of these include the kidnapping of migrant workers in Shanxi Brick kiln, injuries of migrant workers who asked for their owed wages in Inner Mongolia, the mine disaster and mountain torrents caused the death of migrant workers and so on. The conflict frame was more frequently used in the 2006 and 2007 coverage.

### **News Sources**

Scholars have emphasized the importance of use of different sources on media frames (Entman, 1993; Hornig, 1991; Tankand, 2001). This study found that news sources were not very frequently used in the coverage of migrant workers in either the Mainland or Hong Kong media. The most common sources in the two regions were government officials. This type of source is likely to have contributed to the predominantly responsibility framing. An

interesting observation is that the Hong Kong media interviewed or cited even more officials than did those in the Mainland. This may not be so surprising considering the fact that *Wenwei Po* has one news bureau in every province except Tibet, but only a few people are hired in each bureau, which limits their coverage ability. As Entman (1989, p. 18) suggested, “highly placed government and corporate spokespeople are the safest and easiest sources in terms of giving stories legitimacy.” This explains why *Wenwei Po* relied so heavily on government officials. *Oriental Daily* has even fewer bureaus in the Mainland: only in Beijing, the political center, and Guangdong Province, where most factories owned by Hong Kong businesses are located. Therefore, reaching a wide variety of sources would be even more challenging for them. Sometimes, they quoted from other news agencies such as the Xinhua news agency, which also influenced the sources they included.

Migrant workers were the second most common source but trailed far behind official sources, only equaled two thirds of official source frequency in Mainland and one third of that in Hong Kong. As some have suggested (Li, 2005), migrant workers have rarely been interviewed partially because of their lack of communication ability and partially due to the unwillingness of reporters to talk to people from a group at the bottom of the social ladder.

In short, the news articles offered mainly the views of state officials, without providing equivalent perspectives from migrant workers, their employers and their families. As Entman (1993, p. 54) suggested “Most frames are defined by what they omit as well as include, and the omission of potential problem definitions, explanations, evaluations, and recommendations may be as critical as the inclusions in guiding the audience.” The rare usage of other sources indicates that the media allows the government to set the parameters of the debate and define the essence of the migrant worker social problem.

## News Valence

The tone of news coverage plays an important role in the framing process (Sherfer, 2007). De Vreese (2004) has suggested that the reader's evaluation of stories is strongly related to the valence of the frames in the news story. Negative information always captures one's attention much easier than information with a positive tone (Kahaneman, Slovic, & Tversky, 1982; Marcus, Neuman, & Makuen, 2000; Mutz, 1998). Schoenbach and Semetko (1992) demonstrated that positive coverage tends to decrease perceived issue importance. Little research has been done to measure the effects of neutral stories. The majority of the coverage in this study, however, was neutral. Policies were covered without any discussion of their potential benefits or drawbacks. Another example is a story in the *Southern Urban* on Jan 20, 2008 covering the history of the occupation of garbage collector. The job was once considered to be an honorable occupation; through the years, it has taken on a shameful identity, and now only migrant workers will take this job.

The most likely reason for the predominantly neutral coverage is that journalistic norms of neutrality and objectivity stipulate that the news should be balanced and unbiased (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). These norms lead journalists to avoid explicitly taking a side in the coverage.

With regard to the attitude towards the Chinese government in those reports, the unique situation the Hong Kong media face after the transition is that they struggle with siding with China and upholding journalistic principles (Fung, 1994, 2007). Most of them choose to be centrists and stay away from the risk to take a clear stance when reporting public issues related to China. The professional norms of objectivity and neutrality are still appealing to them, which explains why they try to avoid flag-waving to please the authorities.

In addition, Lee (2001) suggested that through “strategic rituals,” Hong Kong journalists may try to offer the opposite opinion. The findings of this study are in line with this trend. Of the 300 articles in this study, 178 (71.5%) in the two Hong Kong newspapers had a neutral stand toward the Chinese government; one quarter praised the government, and criticizing comments were present in only six articles.

Four of the six criticisms were pointed at the local government or government officials, but not the central government. The same was true for the Mainland coverage. These findings lead to an important observation: since the implementation of welfare policies depends to a great extent on the local governments in China, their motivation to enforce the policies announced by the state government is at the core of the problem. There was no system in place, however, to ensure that local governments are actually executing the policies adopted at the state level. Therefore, they are the ones receiving most criticism in the news coverage. An alternative explanation might be that Chinese journalists are still reluctant to point fingers at the very top, although they find criticism of local authorities to be less risky.

The secondary analysis of tone within each region, however, suggested that the media system also influences the general valence and the tone toward government. The two market-driven newspapers carried more neutral and negative stories as well as neutral attitude toward the government than those funded by the state. To them, increasing market share is the priority, not pleasing the government. In addition, not relying on direct funding from the government also reduces the government’s control (direct or indirect) over their content.

Zheng (2005) suggested the Chinese migrant workers are “a de-powered social group,” referring to that fact that they don’t have any real rights or channels to redress grievances.

The findings of this study were consistent with the characteristics of a de-powered social group. During the past six years, the government issued tons of policies to protect the rights of migrant workers and improve their living conditions, but migrant workers are still miserable. When we look at the news, it is obvious that the media spared no effort to interview government officials and announce their new policies, although they rarely featured migrant workers unless a tragedy happened to them.

### **Implications**

This study provides empirical support to the theoretical proposition that differences in media organizations have a profound impact on the way important social issues are framed in the mass media. In particular, the political environment influences how the media portray a minority group. Another meaningful finding is that even in China, where the media is under the tight control of the government, journalists could report neutrally and allow audiences to make their own judgments. When communication scholars conduct research about the Chinese media, they should keep in mind that, although the biases still exist, the media are doing a better job and continue to improve.

The study reveals that the current media focus too heavily on the practices of the government and not on the plight of the migrant workers themselves. Chinese media practitioners should dig deeper into the real living conditions of migrant workers by visiting them or even living with them for several days to provide a more realistic image to the general public. Such personal coverage could present policy makers with a more thorough understanding of migrant workers prior to making decisions about migrant workers' issues. Chinese journalists could also interview average people to get their opinions on this controversial topic.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

Although the problems of migrant workers have been prominent in China for the last 20 years, this content analysis included only six years of news coverage. A longer time period study would definitely provide a more thorough picture of how this social issue has been framed by the media. Future studies should try to provide a more comprehensive analysis of longitudinal data. The sampling method used in this analysis to condense the abundant amount of coverage of migrant workers in the Mainland media may have also biased the results.

The expressions within the responsibility frame in the two regions may have different meanings. For instance, both Mainland China and Hong Kong news articles were coded “Yes” on the question “whether government should be responsible for this issue.” It is possible that the Mainland article was trying to say a good thing about the government while the Hong Kong news was perhaps trying to argue that the government did nothing to help migrant workers. It is hard to ascertain the real meaning using the same measurements of responsibility frame mentioned above. To detect such differences, using “semantic grammar” though a finer level of analysis may be necessary where the coding unit is usually a sentence or a paragraph. This type of analysis should be added in future research on this topic.

It is important to emphasize that this study focused on print media only. It is possible that television coverage of migrant workers adopted different kinds of frames, such as the human interest frame. Comparing print and television coverage in future studies would inform scholars about the characteristics of the Chinese media system.

To better understand the dynamics of Chinese journalism, it is also desirable to conduct newsroom observations or interviews with local journalists. These two methods

may provide additional insight into the news production routines and help scholars understand why different types of frames become dominant at different times.

Another avenue for further research could be to analyze the detailed policies announced by the central government and then compare them with the media frames. Such research would allow scholars to see how media coverage is affected by the political environment and the specific policies outlined by the government.

## Appendix

### I. Content Analysis Coding Sheet

1. Item ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_
2. Coder: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Source: news from \_\_\_\_\_
4. Date(year): \_\_\_\_\_
5. Overall tone: \_\_\_\_\_ (if positive, code 1; neutral, code 2; negative, code 3)
6. Tone towards government: \_\_\_\_\_ (if positive, code 1; neutral, code 2; negative, code 3; not applicable, code 4)

Frames: mark each question as yes (1) or no (0).

#### Attribution of Responsibility

7. Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Does the story suggest that an individual or a group of people in society is responsible for the issue-problem? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Human Interest frame

12. Does the story provide a human example or "human face" on the issue? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Does the story show or discuss how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Does the story go into the personal or private lives of the actors? \_\_\_\_\_
15. Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy- caring, sympathy or compassion? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Conflict frame

16. Does the story reflect disagreement between parties/individuals-groups-countries?  
\_\_\_\_\_
17. Does one party-individual-group-country criticize another? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?  
\_\_\_\_\_
19. Does the story refer to winners and losers? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Economic consequences frame

20. Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future? \_\_\_\_\_
21. Is there a mention of the cost/degree of expense involved? \_\_\_\_\_
22. Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of

action? \_\_\_\_

Morality frame

23. Does the story mention customs or tradition differences between city and rural area?  
\_\_\_\_\_

24. Does the story suggest some social norms that city citizens want migrant workers to follow? \_\_\_\_\_

25. Are migrant workers treated with dignity? \_\_\_\_\_

**Sources: mark each item as yes (1) or no (0).**

26. Government officials \_\_\_\_\_

27. NGOs \_\_\_\_\_

28. Scholars \_\_\_\_\_

29. Migrant workers \_\_\_\_\_

30. Family members of migrant workers \_\_\_\_\_

31. Employers \_\_\_\_\_

32. Others \_\_\_\_\_

33. Who is the author? \_\_\_\_\_

1) Reporter of the newspaper

2) Editor of the newspaper

3) Reporter of other media

4) Commentator

5) Columnist

6) Others

34. Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## II. Inter-coder Reliability Table

Variables	Kappa
Tone	0.919**
Govtone	0.724**
responsibility1	0.889**
responsibility2	0.933**
responsibility3	0.774**
responsibility4	0.945**
responsibility5	0.754**
humaninterest1	0.883**
humaninterest2	0.931**
humaninterest3	1.000**
humaninterest4	0.896**
conflict1	0.888**
conflict2	1.000**
conflict3	0.863**
conflict4	1.000**
economic1	1.000**
economic2	0.938**
economic3	0.969**
morality1	1.000**
morality2	1.000**
morality3	0.931**
Official	0.888**
NGO	1.000**
Scholar	0.845**
migrant worker	0.746**
Family	0.795**
Employer	0.927**
Author	0.937**
Average	0.90625

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