Discriminatory news discourse: some Hong Kong data
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What is This?
ABSTRACT. This article analyses the discriminatory discursive practices of one leading liberal Hong Kong newspaper, the South China Morning Post, with a view to examining to what extent they mirror those found in the literature (which to date has focused primarily on Europe). The data for the study consist of 80 articles concerning one news event, Chinese Mainlanders claiming the right-of-abode in Hong Kong during the period 30 January 1999 to 19 August 2000. A review of the rather diffuse literature leads to the development of a composite taxonomy of discriminatory discursive practices. The Hong Kong data are then tested against this taxonomy. Examples of all of the strategies in the taxonomy are found to be present in the Hong Kong data, with certain local variations due to the particular situation of Hong Kong. The findings are all the more striking because the people who are the focus of the discrimination are from the same ethnic and linguistic background. In contrast to the news stories, a comparison with the editorials on the right-of-abode issue in the South China Morning Post reveals a much more liberal tone in the latter. This raises the question as to whether it is the news stories or the editorials that represent the true institutional ideology of this influential Hong Kong newspaper.

KEY WORDS: China; discriminatory discourse; discriminatory practices; discursive practices; Hong Kong; ideology; media discourse

Introduction

Recent research in critical discourse analysis (CDA) has shown an increasing interest in the study of racial discrimination. In most of the reported cases, the victims of discrimination tend to be minority groups residing in a host country (e.g. Turks in Germany, Africans in France), and so discrimination tends to cut across both ethnic and language boundaries. Although few people who dislike members of other social groups would openly admit to harbouring
discrimination, CDA research has demonstrated that a discriminatory stance may
be shown to be embedded in discursive practices in the form of subtle linguistic
strategies (e.g. Bar-Tal, 1989; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997; Graumann and
Winternantel, 1989; Gruber, 1997; Horvat et al., 1997; Teo, 2000; van Dijk,
1993a, 1993b, 1995; van Dijk and Smitherman-Donaldson, 1988; Wodak et al.,
1999).

In this study, we draw upon the reporting of one major news event – immi-
grants from Mainland China claiming the right-of-abode in the Hong Kong
Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of China – in one Hong Kong English
language newspaper, the *South China Morning Post* (hereafter SCMP), with a view
to examining one major research question: to what extent linguistic strategies of
discrimination as reported in the literature are also found in our Hong Kong data.
Our findings show that all the major strategies identified in the literature are also
to be found in our data. Of further interest is the fact that these findings apply to
people from the same ethnic and linguistic background.

Our corpus consists of articles with a major focus on the right-of-abode ques-
tion collected during the period 30 January 1999 to 19 August 2000. This search
yielded a total of 80 articles. The SCMP was selected as it is the leading English
language newspaper in Hong Kong, has traditionally been viewed as one of the
‘newspapers of record’, and appeals to an elite, mostly liberal readership.

Compared with other sites in which discursive practices of discrimination are
subjected to scrutiny, Hong Kong presents an interesting case. British colonial
rule ended on 30 June 1997, when the sovereignty of Hong Kong reverted to the
People’s Republic of China amidst a great deal of fanfare broadcast live and wit-
nessed by millions of television viewers worldwide. In terms of ethnic compo-
sition, Hong Kong has always been a predominantly Chinese city. No fewer than
98 percent of the inhabitants, estimated at about 6.8 million, are ethnic Chinese
with Cantonese as their mother tongue. The majority of Chinese Hongkongers
are descendants of successive waves of immigrants from Mainland China who
fled socio-political turmoil and/or natural disasters and came to seek refuge and
shelter under the British flag (Flowerdew, 1998; Li, in press). For about three
decades, from the founding of the People’s Republic in 1949 to the late 1970s,
travel and other forms of communication between Hong Kong and China were
difficult and extremely limited. Meanwhile, a symbiosis of Western business
organization, entrepreneurial spirit and capital of businessmen from Shanghai,
coupled with traditional Chinese virtues, industry and thrift, turned Hong Kong
into a vibrant manufacturing and financial centre. Sustained economic growth
significantly improved the livelihood of many, who began to consider Hong Kong
their home (Li, in press). Since the mid-1980s, however, manufacturing as the
dominant type of economic activity gradually gave way to service industries.
Today, there is widespread consensus that as one of the most important trading
and financial centres in the world, Hong Kong is developing in the direction of a
knowledge-based economy.

The economic boom since the 1960s and the widely publicized Sino–British
negotiation over the political future of Hong Kong from the early 1980s, led many Chinese Hongkongers to rethink who they were. Back in 1978 when China under Deng Xiaoping declared to the whole world its intention to end decades of political isolation and to adopt an open-door policy, Chinese Hongkongers, especially those who were born and bred locally, gradually developed a Hong Kong (Chinese) identity. Several factors contributed to the formation of such an identity: the Hong Kong way of life, characterized among other things by a laissez-faire economy, freedom of speech and the rule of law; the colonial government’s campaigns since the 1970s in promoting a stronger sense of belonging (e.g. ‘Hong Kong Festival’ and the ‘Keep Hong Kong clean campaign’); and above all, the emergence of a distinctive ‘Hong Kong culture’ transmitted principally via television, films and pop songs (‘Canto-pop’) – all expressed in the increasingly prestigious regional vernacular, Cantonese.

One of the most influential framers of Hong Kong identity is popular media such as sitcoms and soap operas, which are primary sites at which sophisticated local social practices mixed with Western cultural values are juxtaposed or contrasted with crude, laughable Mainland Chinese practices, including the immigrants’ accented Cantonese. As Ma and Fung (1999) have pointed out:

The [Hong Kong] media absorbed Western values, transformed Chinese cultural particulars, articulated local experiences, and crystallized images of a distinct Hong Kong way of life. This newly found [Hong Kong] identity was largely constructed by foregrounding the cultural differences between Hong Kongers and the mainland Chinese. Accordingly, in the mass media, mainlanders were stigmatized as ‘uncivilized’ outsiders and a ready-made cultural contrast against which modern, cosmopolitan Hong Kongers could define themselves. Since most Hong Kongers are ethnic Chinese, the Sino-Hong Kong cultural differentiation, or the ‘othering’ of mainland Chinese, was a significant process from which the distinctive local Hong Kong identity emerged. (Ma and Fung, 1999: 500)

One consequence of the ‘othering’ of Mainland Chinese, as propagated in popular media, is therefore the reinforcement of a ‘them versus us’ mindset. It is in this way that Mainland Chinese are stigmatized in the collective subconscious of the home-grown generations. This helps explain Chinese Hongkongers’ covert hostility and general indifference to the plight of Chinese immigrants from the Mainland.

At the political level after the handover, in accordance with Beijing’s pledge of ‘one country, two systems’, Hong Kong, being a special administrative region of China, was allowed to retain the capitalistic economy and legal system inherited from the colonial era. The transition was relatively smooth, although not without political and social controversies under the leadership of the Chief Executive, Tung Chee-hwa, in the first three years of his government. It must be pointed out, however, that ‘one country, two systems’ is a grand, unprecedented socio-political arrangement or model of decolonization. In his handling of various social and political crises, accentuated by an economic downturn afflicting the Asia–Pacific region, the Chief Executive has been accused of being too eager to accommodate...
the interests of Beijing, thus laying stronger emphasis on ‘one country’, at the expense of the interests of Hong Kong and its people, thereby overshadowing ‘two systems’. The ‘right-of-abode’ controversy, which has been a major news story during most of the post-handover period, is a case in point.

According to Article 24(3) of the Basic Law – the mini-constitution of the HKSAR – all children born to Hong Kong permanent residents outside the HKSAR would automatically be entitled to the right-of-abode. More specifically, a child will be entitled to this right provided that at least one of the parents is already a HKSAR permanent resident (which usually means having resided in the territory for at least seven years uninterruptedly) when the child is born. To exercise this right, however, these children are expected to file an application to the Mainland Chinese immigration authorities requesting a permit to enter the HKSAR. The provisions in the Basic Law, however, do not specify whether those children who came to the HKSAR through illegal means should be allowed to exercise that right. What eluded the drafters of the Basic Law and the HKSAR government is that thousands of Mainlanders born to Hongkongers either rushed to Hong Kong on a two-way entry permit or entered Hong Kong illegally shortly before the handover in July 1997, in the hope of claiming their ‘Hong Kong resident’ status immediately after the political transition. Consequently, there was a sudden rise in the number of Mainlanders entering Hong Kong in the months immediately prior to the handover. This development, generally described in the newspapers as an ‘influx’, creates a social perception among Hongkongers that these immigrants ‘jumped the queue’. In addition, there was widespread concern about potential family problems after it was revealed that a significant number of such immigrants were illegitimate children born to male, married Hongkongers doing business in the Mainland. Indeed, this practice has been so common among Hong Kong Chinese businessmen residing in the Mainland that it is popularly referred to as baau yih laai (‘keeping a concubine’). If the illegitimate children were allowed to automatically become Hong Kong residents, it was feared, a great deal of family problems would arise in the local households affected.

Alarmed by the large number of abode-seekers, the HKSAR government decided to repatriate the ‘overstayers’ and ‘IIs’ (illegal immigrants), a move that sparked off a long, bitter legal dispute between the right-of-abode claimants and the government. In retrospect, it was as if a bomb had been planted in the drafting process of the Basic Law. The legal disputes lasted for a considerable period with many twists and turns.

One of the most dramatic developments was the ruling of the Court of Final Appeal (CFA) in January 1999, which ruled in favour of granting the right-of-abode to the ‘overstayers’ and ‘IIs’ on the grounds that the abode-seekers were merely exercising their right accorded to them by the Basic Law, regardless of how they entered Hong Kong. A few days after this ruling, the SAR government gave a press conference at which some figures were publicized, the most eye-catching of which was that an estimated 1.67 million immigrants would have the right to enter Hong Kong in the next three years. These figures suggested that if
the CFA’s ruling was left to prevail, Hong Kong would have to receive a huge number of immigrants, further stretching the already strained demand for social services and resources. Shortly after this move, the SAR government made known its intention to request the National People’s Congress (NPC), a central government body – amidst strong opposition and protest in public – to overrule the CFA. This request was accepted and the Standing Committee of the NPC subsequently declared the CFA’s ruling to be void and introduced a new ruling, whereby all children born to Hong Kong permanent residents must first obtain a Certificate of Entitlement from the Chinese immigration authorities before being admitted into the HKSAR. As a result of this new ruling, all ‘overstayers’ and ‘IIs’ faced imminent repatriation. This gave rise to a public controversy, with pro-human rights groups, on the one hand, and pro-HKSAR/Beijing forces and pressure groups, on the other hand, being the main contestants. The legal sector itself was also divided on this issue. The biggest losers are no doubt those immigrants who saw their fate tossed and turned by the authorities within a matter of months.

Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an approach to analysing discourses (written and spoken) with a view to revealing:

(a) the relationship between language and society, and
(b) the relationship between analysis and the practices analysed. (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 258)

Fairclough (1995: 55) regards language as constitutive of social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and belief. This presupposition is based on the systemic linguistic theory of Halliday (1985: 53–4), which emphasizes how language simultaneously performs three major functions: (i) representing the world (ideational function), (ii) enacting social relations and identities (interpersonal function) and (iii) relating the context of situation (textual function). Building on Halliday’s theory on the characteristics of language to CDA, Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 258) see discourse in its social context in such a way that ‘it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people’. They emphasize the significance of the socially influential power of discourse in producing and reproducing unequal power relations in society and how discursive structures activate institutional ideologies.

CDA enables us to look into the discourse dimensions of power abuse, which leads to injustice and inequality. As one of the essential functions of text and talk is to manage the mind of others, we can analyse the linguistic structures and the discursive strategies of a discourse in order to uncover the power struggle, social inequality and any other form of social and political problems (van Dijk, 1993a). It is therefore apparent that the social, political and cultural organization of
dominance in the language structures of a discourse is constitutive of a hierarchy of power. When applied to the analysis of social inequality, CDA can give an account of how the discourse structures, which are established through various linguistic patterns and structures (micro-level notions), work in their specific ways to convey the social cognitions (macro-level notions), which in turn contribute to the development of the social structures of inequality and injustice of power in society.

**CDA in the media context**

As this study concentrates on the analysis of a corpus of news discourse (a type of media discourse), we will enrich our analysis by incorporating the media perspective. Bell and Garrett (1998: 18) recommend Fowler’s (1994) approach as ‘the most accessible’ framework for analysing media language. In particular, they appreciate his approach for its analysis of language structures such as transitivity, passives, modality, nominalization, and especially lexical choice in functional terms.

Fowler’s analytical tools were drawn from Halliday’s systemic functional approach to language. Fowler considers Halliday’s framework the best model for examining the connections between linguistic structure and social values and ideologies (Fowler, 1994: 39–42). Hence, he also sees language as performing simultaneously the ‘ideational’, ‘interpersonal’ and ‘textual’ functions. His studies of news discourse have illustrated how it is constructed according to the stylistic and ideological conventions of the newspaper, not of the writer. That means, news discourse activates an institutional voice rather than a personal voice. The writer is constituted by the discourse, which is embedded in the social and institutional ideologies. This major finding helps reveal the potential discursive practice of discrimination in news discourse, which is achieved by means of a variety of discursive strategies and linguistic tools.

**Discriminatory discourse structures and strategies in CDA**

A survey of the work in CDA of discriminatory discourse to date reveals a number of common, and partly overlapping, discriminatory discourse strategies. What we found is that, depending on the scholar, different terms are used to label what are essentially the same discriminatory discourse strategies, making comparison across cultures and sites of discrimination research rather difficult. Below, we present a summary of the discriminatory discourse strategies as used by leading scholars in the field, before proposing what we consider to be a more unified and coherent taxonomy (see Table 1).

Van Dijk (1995: 17) theorizes that ideologies in discourse and communication are ‘enacted’ in different forms of action and interaction (verbally or non-verbally), and that the reproduction of ideologies is embedded in organizational and institutional contexts. He regards the ideologies of the press as primarily to sustain,
legitimate or manage group conflicts and relationships of power and dominance. The enactment, production and reproduction of dominance relations in the discourse structures are achieved by means of various strategies which are discursive, cognitive and social in nature. These discursive strategies are regarded as socio-cognitive, realized in the linguistic forms and patterns, and contribute to the social functions of the ideologies of the institution or groups of people. In other words, the socio-cognitive strategies are embedded in the discourse structures which serve to transmit the ideologies and attitudes of the newspaper to the readers through various linguistic forms and patterns.

In his wide-ranging research on racism and discrimination, van Dijk (1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1991, 1993a, 1993b) has discussed a number of socio-cognitive strategies for empowering the majority group and discrediting the minority group, as follows:

1. Scare tactics: the use of exaggerated figures and extensive attention to the alleged threat to the interests and privileges of the dominant group as a way to create panic and discredit the powerless group;
2. Categorical generalization: generalized ascription to the minority group which is stereotyping or cognitively prejudiced;
3. Positive self-presentation, as opposed to negative other-presentation;
4. Positive discrimination/self-justification: accusing the minority group for creating a burden of social resources as a way of justifying the majority group’s discriminatory attitude;
5. Problematization: to problematize issues concerning the minority group such as immigration, residence, cultural conflicts, etc.;
6. Blaming the victim: that the minority in question are to blame for causing conflicts or problems;
7. Disclaimers: verbal denial of discrimination; and
8. Mitigation: downtoning, minimizing or using euphemisms when describing the negative actions of the dominant group.

Wodak (described in Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) has devised the ‘discourse–historical method’ to ‘integrate systematically all available background information in the analysis and interpretation of the many layers of a written or spoken text’ (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 266). With a similar interest in social inequality and racism, Wodak elaborates and refines van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach. She employs a multidisciplinary approach in which discourses are analyzed in three interwoven dimensions: contents, strategies, and means and forms of realization. Her definition of strategies as applied in discourse analysis differs slightly from van Dijk’s approach but accords with the concept of Heinemann and Viehweger (1991) in the following way:

... strategies mediate between communicative functions and objectives deduced from the interaction and the social conditions of interacting partners and, on the other hand, the realization of linguistic means and their structuration. (Heinemann and Viehweger, 1991, cited in Wodak, 1997: 32)
In their study of the discursive formation of national identity, Wodak and her colleagues have developed a set of macro-strategies with subcategories of highly refined strategies, some of which involve discrimination against foreigners, as follows (Wodak 1997: 36–42):

(i) strategies of justification and relativization:
shift of blame and responsibility, downplaying/trivialization, legitimation/delegitimation.

(ii) strategies of transformation:
positive self-presentation, heteronomization or warning against heteronomy, autonomization, discontinuating/dissimilation, devaluation/negative connotation, vitalization.

(iii) strategies of dismantling or destruction:
discrediting opponents, negative presentation of self/others, heteronomization, assimilation, dissimilation/exclusion, discontinuation, strategy of pronouncing somebody/something ‘dead’, ‘Cassandra’ strategy.

Adopting the approach of Wodak and her colleagues, Gruber (1997) has studied the coverage of right-wing extremism and neo-Nazism in Austria’s most widely read tabloid. In his investigation, he has identified two major types of argumentation strategies: strategies of group definition and strategies of justification. His strategies of justification are similar to those discussed by van Dijk and Wodak. These strategies of justification are (Gruber, 1997: 143–6):

(i) Trivialization
– Rationalization
– Scapegoating/Blaming the victim
– Ridiculing/Devaluating

(ii) Disavowal of guilt/responsibility
– Blaming the victim
– Construction of conspiracy theories against the in-group (through exaggerated discursive presentation of hostile/negative characteristics of the out-group)

(iii) Denial of responsibility (refusal to face a reproach).

Apart from critical discourse analysts who have conducted extensive research on the issues of racism or social inequality, there are other writers who have used different approaches to investigate similar issues. Graumann and Wintemantel (1989) look into the social, mental and linguistic features of discourses on social discrimination and conceptualize a set of discriminatory speech acts within a social psychological framework. They regard social discrimination as a form of social action and examine how it takes effect and how it is realized linguistically. They have derived a number of ‘cognitive-emotional processes’ which are based upon the traditional studies in social psychology of stereotypes and prejudice, and the linguistic manifestations of these processes. This set of cognitive-emotional processes serves the social function of discrimination in different forms as follows:
Social Function | Cognitive-emotional Processes
--- | ---
1. Separating | Differentiating, Categorizing
2. Distancing | Dichotomizing, Focus on differences
3. Accentuating | Exaggerating differences, Polarizing
4. Debasing/degrading | Categorical negative evaluation, Affective responses to social category
5. Fixating | Stereotyping
6. Assigning traits | Categorical attribution of negative characteristics
7. Typing | Categorization as type or as typical

(Graumann and Wintermantel, 1989: 184–97)

Bar-Tal (1989: 172–3) scrutinizes the process of delegitimation and develops a list of micro-strategies for delegitimizing the minority group:

(i) Dehumanization: categorization of a group as inhuman or inferior race or animals;
(ii) Outcasting: categorization of a delegitimized group as violators of pivotal social norms;
(iii) Trait characterization: attribution of extremely negative and unacceptable personality traits to the minority group;
(iv) Use of political labels: categorization of the minority group into totally unacceptable political groups; and
(v) Group comparison: labelling the minority group as a symbol of malice, evil or wickedness.

Horvat et al. (1997) study the process of delegitimation of the refugee problem in Slovenia, focusing on the use of exaggeration and scare tactics. The manipulation of the number of refugees is realized in the form of metaphor, whereas the exaggeration of threats to the public order is accomplished by means of a process of ‘abnormalization’ and ‘criminalization’ (Horvat et al., 1997: 190–5).

Analysing the ideological construction of racism in newspaper reports in Australia, Teo (2000) adopts an eclectic CDA approach by integrating the theories of Fowler, van Dijk, Fairclough and Wodak. He studies news reports relating to a Vietnamese gang in Australia and discovers evidence of a systematic ‘othering’ and ‘stereotyping’ of the ethnic community by the white majority. More significantly for the present study, Teo’s work unmasks the racist ideology of the press, which is manifested in an ‘asymmetrical power discourse’ (Teo, 2000: 7). He differentiates various cognitive strategies which help shape the discourse and serve to protect the interests of the in-group. The following are the strategies he describes (Teo, 2000: 16–23):

(i) Positive Us-presentation and Negative Them-presentation in the news headlines and leads;
(ii) Generalization: to ascribe certain key qualities to the main participants of the news discourse without presenting details;
(iii) Stereotyping: to perpetuate an Us-versus-Them mentality between the dominant majority and the ethnic minority:
(iv) Denial of minority voice: to enhance the status and visibility of the powerful, and to silence and disempower the powerless through quotation patterns; and

(v) Othering: by means of over-lexicalization (i.e. the use of a range of words of similar meaning) of the minority group, to establish a pejorative effect which signals deviation from the social convention and expectations, and reflects perceptions and judgements from the biased standpoint of such cultural norms/social expectations.

Composite taxonomy in this study
The different taxonomies cited above seem to be scattered around a central theme of power dominance and discrimination. In order to paint a full picture of the situation in Hong Kong, we will try to integrate the different terminologies to form a composite taxonomy of discourse strategies, which will help to examine and illustrate the manifestation of discourse strategies and structures in our data concerning the right-of-abode crisis. The composite taxonomy, which consists of four categories of discourse strategies, is summarized in Table 1.

NEGATIVE OTHER PRESENTATION
Van Dijk describes the strategy of drawing readers’ attention to the ‘negative social or cultural differences, deviance or threats attributed to “them”’ as negative other presentation. This term is preferred as the strategy consists of focusing on the negative, repugnant characteristics of the ‘other’ group, typically a minority group. The spread of negative attributes will gradually result in the formation of stereotypes in the readers’ attitudes towards the ‘other’ group. This, in turn, may lead to social isolation of the ‘other’ group.

SCARE TACTICS
Scare tactics are achieved by means of the use of exaggerated figures and survey statistics in order to create threat and panic to the society of the majority group. The massive use of scare tactics in the media discourse can stir up panicky emotions among the general public and thus foment a collective hostile attitude against the minority group.

BLAMING THE VICTIM
This strategy of putting all the blame on the victim instead of the offender is regarded as the most extreme form of ‘scapegoating’ (Gruber, 1997). Adopting this strategy allows the majority group to focus attention on the burden caused by the victim or minority group and thus to deny and even shift the responsibility involved to the latter. Ultimately, the use of this strategy will help the majority group to justify their discriminatory attitude towards the minority group.

DELEGITIMATION
Some writers have used different terminologies to describe the use of delegitimation as a way to outcast a minority group as outsiders by the majority group. This
**TABLE 1. Composite taxonomy of discriminatory discourse strategies as found in the CDA literature**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse strategies</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Description of category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(A) Negative Other Presentation</strong></td>
<td>van Dijk: Negative Other Presentation</td>
<td>Focuses attention on the negative social or cultural differences, deviance or threats attributed to ‘them’; effective in sustaining existing attitudes or forming new negative attitudes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teo: Negative-Them Presentation/Othering</td>
<td>Accentuates positive Us-presentation vs Negative Them-presentation in the news headlines and leads. Uses over-lexicalization to stigmatize the minority group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graumann and Wintermantel: Fixating (Labelling and Stereotyping)</td>
<td>Assigns negative traits by labelling others with adjectives, and assigns types by stereotyping others with nouns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bar-Tal: Trait Characterization</td>
<td>Attributes extremely negative and unacceptable personality traits to the minority group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wodak: Negative Presentation of Self/Others</td>
<td>Disparages the ‘locus amoenus’, even employs ‘negative singularization’, that is, to emphasize the negative national uniqueness to help construct singularity in connection with negative attributions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(B) Scare Tactics</strong></td>
<td>van Dijk: Scare Tactics</td>
<td>Uses exaggerated figures and extensive attention to alleged threat to the interests and privileges of the dominant group as a way to create panic and discredit the powerless group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horvat et al.: Abnormalization and criminalization of the other</td>
<td>Uses exaggeration and scare tactics by means of manipulation of the number of refugees . . . the exaggeration of threats to the public order. . .</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>(C) Blaming the Victim</strong></td>
<td>van Dijk: Blaming the Victim, Positive Discrimination/Self-Justification Gruber: Blaming the Victim Wodak: Justification</td>
<td>Accuses the minority group for creating a burden of social resources as an attempt to justify the majority group’s discriminatory attitude. The most extreme form of ‘scapegoating’: the victim, instead of the offender, is to blame for the course of events. Justifies a ‘societal status quo ante’ by emphasizing the legitimacy of past acts and attitudes of the majority group (the ‘own’ national ‘we’-group).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
macro-strategy is typically realized by such micro-strategies as outcasting (Bar-Tal) and discrediting and disempowering the minority group (Wodak). Delegitimation plays an essential role in outlawing the status of and disempowering the rights claimed by the minority group.

In what follows, we show that, to a very large extent, the strategies in this composite taxonomy can be found in our data. The analysis of the use of discourse strategies and their linguistic manifestations forms the major description in this study. By describing the discourse strategies used in our data, we aim to uncover the ideologies that are embedded in the discourse structures and reveal the less transparent institutional values, beliefs and attitudes of the SCMP in regard to the socially contentious issue of granting or denying right-of-abode to immigrants from Mainland China.

**Findings**

In the analysis of our data, it is found that the four categories of discourse strategies in the composite taxonomy comprise subcategories of micro-strategies which are manifested in the linguistic form and structure of our corpus. How these micro-strategies are used in our SCMP news discourse data will be illustrated below.

**NEGATIVE OTHER PRESENTATION**

*Negatively connoted metaphors*  Van Dijk (1993b) discusses the use of positive representation of the own group and the negative representation of the ‘Others’ as complementary strategies for the justification of inequality. These strategies can be achieved by focusing attention on the ‘negative social or cultural differences, deviance or threats attributed to “them”’ (1993b: 263). He stresses that these strategies are effective in sustaining existing attitudes or forming new negative attitudes. In our corpus, the use of negative representation of the ‘Others’ is prevalent, whereas the other complementary strategy – positive representation of the own group – is relatively rare. The use of negatively connotated metaphors is the dominant tactic used for negatively presenting the ‘other’ group.

The SCMP makes use of a number of metaphors that convey negative
implications to describe the immigrants from China who are claiming the right-of-abode in Hong Kong. The dominant metaphors used in our corpus are **flood**, **influx** and **burden**. These metaphors contain clear connotations that a large number of immigrants would have a tremendous, and above all negative and unwanted, social impact on the Hong Kong community. These negatively connotated metaphors are used frequently in the headlines, leads and body of news reports, and have become naturalized over the past three years when the Mainland migrants tried hard to obtain the right-of-abode in Hong Kong. Some writers even describe the immigrants as a ‘mass influx’ or ‘exodus’ in the news articles (990203). Below are some typical examples of negatively connotated metaphors found in the headlines and leads of our data:

(a) **Influx** fears after victory on abode (990130sc)  
   [Headline]
(b) Anson warns of abode ruling **burden** (990131)  [Headline]
(c) Taskforce on migrants: Calculations begin amid fears of **huge influx** after abode ruling (990203)  [Headline]
(d) 1000 migrants a day could move to SAR, creating a **‘heavy burden’** warn officials (990429sc)  [Lead]
(e) Stemming a **flood** (990429sd)  [Headline]
(f) Gren Manuel discloses how the poll being used to project a potential **mass influx** of mainland migrants is riddled with holes (990506)  [Lead]
(g) **Influx** may send jobless rate spiralling to 25% (990507sc)  [Headline]
(h) Orchestrating an unjust **exodus** (000819)  [Headline]

Van Dijk and Smitherman-Donaldson (1988: 226–7) regard the headline as the ‘top’ and the ‘identification tag’ of a news report in three important aspects: semantic, schematic and organizational aspects. Headlines provide the semantic framework for readers’ interpretation of the news story, and search and retrieval of old information. Thus, headlines can take up a central and revealing role in the production and reproduction of discriminatory ideologies in the press. The headlines and leads cited above all point to a central motif that migrants are considered unwelcome and unwanted by the Hong Kong people. The semantic choice of negatively connotated words in the news headlines and leads helps to build up a biased stance on the abode issue.

Bell (1991) differentiates between the headline, the lead and the body of a news report and suggests that the headline and the lead are the most salient parts. Simply by scanning through the headline and the lead, readers can easily and immediately catch the main points of the news. More significantly, he describes the lead as a ‘micro story’, which gives a ‘directional summary’ of the news to help focus attention on the gist of the news and magnify its news value. He explains that the writing of headlines is usually the work of sub-editors, not
journalists who only produce the lead and the body (1991: 186). In the media context, the accumulative use of negatively connotated metaphors in the headlines and the leads of news reports conveys a discriminatory tone which is indicative of its institutional voice and value.

As for the choice of negatively connoted metaphors (e.g. influx, flood, burden, exodus), our Hong Kong data are in line with research findings reported elsewhere, suggesting that these metaphors are probably universal in discriminatory discourse.

Negative attributions The SCMP also reports on Hong Kong people’s negative impression of Mainland immigrants by quoting survey results and highlighting the key adjectives that ascribe negative attributes to the immigrants. This kind of report draws attention to the purported negative characteristics of the Mainland migrants, which may not be representative of the major findings of survey results. The negative characteristics attributed to the Mainland migrants obtain direct and immediate coverage in the news reports. For example:

(a) ‘. . . The Movement Against Discrimination said migrants were being negatively stereotyped by the Government as poor and unemployable.’ (9905018) [Lead]

(b) Migrants dirty and uneducated: poll (990907sc) [Headline]
   ‘People are becoming less tolerant towards mainland migrants and regard them as uneducated and unhygienic, according to a survey. . . . The survey found new arrivals were generally seen as uneducated, dirty and with little understanding of the rule of law. . . .’ (990907sc) [Body]

(c) ‘Mainlanders describe daily humiliation: Immigrant Leung Liu Yuet-fan . . . claims she was rejected from jobs because employers believed she was uneducated and ignorant. . . . ‘often, people at the marketplace shout, complaining new immigrants are picky and stingy.’ she [43-year-old Lui So Shuk-hing who arrived three years ago] said.’ (990907sd) [Body]

(d) Mainlanders ‘regularly insulted as bumpkins’ (000728) [Headline]

(e) ‘. . . ‘They claim these people are uneducated, uncivilised and lazy,’ he [Human Rights Monitor spokesman Ho Hei-wah] said. . . . ‘People think that if mainlanders come here they’ll lose their jobs. They say “you’re making Hong Kong society worse, you’re destroying stability”’ he said.’ (000728) [Body]

By directing readers’ attention to the supposed negative characteristics of the migrants, the SCMP manages to form and fixate the uncritical reader’s views on this minority group, creating a degraded and unpopular image against them. In terms of the epithets used in making negative attributions, those which are found in our Hong Kong data (e.g. poor, uneducated, ignorant, dirty, uncivilised, lazy) are very similar to those reported elsewhere, with the exception of perhaps one attribute: ‘with little understanding of the rule of law’. If this is indeed unusual as a negative attribute in international research on discriminatory discourse, it is because the rule of law is prized by the HKSAR government as one of the most important pillars of a liberal society – a legacy it has inherited from the British colonial regime (Flowerdew, 1998).
Labelling: collocation and repetitive use of labels for the right-of-abode seekers

By collocating and repeating a group of labels ascribed to the immigrants from China, The SCMP reinforces the following negative values on the Mainland migrants:

- ‘mainlanders’: they are not from Hong Kong and therefore belong to an ‘out’ group (although they are of the same race and the majority of Hong Kong residents or their parents originated from the mainland)
- ‘overstayers’: they abuse their right to remain in Hong Kong
- ‘illegitimate mainland children’: by virtue of their illegitimacy their right to live in Hong Kong is compromised (although this has yet to be established by the courts)
- ‘illegal immigrants’: by law, they do not have the legal right to live in Hong Kong (although, again, this has yet to be established through the courts)
- ‘claimants’: they are supplicants and therefore belong to an ‘out’ group

The above-mentioned labels are frequently used in the SCMP to refer to people who have come to Hong Kong from China in an attempt to seek their right-of-abode in Hong Kong as stated in the Basic Law. Even before the Mainland migrants’ legal status has been decided by the courts, they are already labelled as an ‘illegal’ or ‘illegitimate’ group of people. By assigning and repeatedly using these stereotypical labels to refer to them in the news reports, especially in the headlines and leads, therefore, the SCMP wittingly or otherwise stigmatizes the abode-seekers from China as an ‘out-group’. Labelling is one of the tactics of ‘negative other presentation’. The tactic becomes naturalized as the collocated labels for the powerless group (the abode-seekers) become stereotypes.

Probably because of circumstances specific to the Hong Kong context, most of the labels found in our data (e.g. Mainlanders, overstayers, illegitimate Mainland children, claimants) appear to be unique to the discriminatory discourse surrounding the right-of-abode issue in Hong Kong.

SCARE TACTICS

In its reports of government announcements concerning the right-of-abode, the SCMP, wittingly or unwittingly, serves as the mouthpiece for the government. The government constantly uses a negative agenda-setting technique in its official announcements on the right-of-abode issue. As all the press widely covers these threatening official announcements, the government’s discourse strategy of scare tactics, as mediated by the press, becomes naturalized and succeeds in inciting fears and resentment among the public vis-à-vis the migrants.

Writing in the Hong Kong Standard, the other major English language newspaper in Hong Kong at that time, Professor Yash Ghai of the University of Hong Kong claimed that the government had set up a ‘task force’ to create fears of an impending ‘influx’ by presenting ‘doomsday’ estimates of the number of potential migrants and unbearable financial and social consequences. By ‘task force’, he means the joint effort of government leaders and officials in painting a threatening picture of a socially deprived community as a consequence of the
potential influx of Mainland migrants. He criticizes the government’s reactions to
the issue as a way to stimulate and encourage resentment against Mainlanders as
if they were ‘invaders, unconnected with the community here’ (Hong Kong
Standard, 26 May 1999), whereas in fact the Chinese in Hong Kong are of the
same race as their counterparts in China and, since 1 July 1997, Hong Kong has
been a part of China. Allen Lee, a deputy of the National People’s Congress, also
blamed the government for stoking public fears of the immigrants (Hong Kong
Standard, 14 May 1999).

Predicting threat to interests and privileges of the dominant group Scare tactics can
be achieved by stirring up worries and fears among the dominant group. In the
case of the right-of-abode issue the dominant group is the residents of Hong
Kong. The government and its allies make announcements to incite fears and
resentment against the Mainland immigrants by predicting possible threats to
the public’s interests and privileges in various aspects. The following are examples of
such tactics, as found in the corpus:

(a) ‘. . . “The arrival of thousands of migrant children could have a ‘serious and adverse
impact’ on education for Hong Kong students,” the Government admitted yesterday.
. . .’ (990130sd)
(b) ‘The Court of Final Appeal ruling on residency rights for mainland-born children will
be a burden on resources, . . . Anson Chan Fang On-sang [Government Chief
Secretary] says . . . Executive Councillor Antony Leung Kam-chung believed the
arrival of migrant children would put extra pressure on the education system. . . .’
(990131)
(c) ‘Right of abode migrants could stir social unrest and bear the brunt of anger over jobs
and welfare, it was claimed yesterday . . . The Hong Kong Council of Social Service
called on the Government to channel more resources into relieving potential griev-
ances and reducing the gap with the migrants. . . . “Many people are unhappy because
they fear the mainlanders will flood Hong Kong, crowd schools and compete with us
for jobs and housing. . . . and there will be social unrest.” [Council Director Hui Yin-fat
said] . . . ’ (990205)
(d) ‘. . . tens of thousands of mainland residents settling in Hong Kong will cause a rapid
increase in population and the unemployment rate, and a more crowded living
environment,” Mrs Ip, Secretary for Security, said. . . .’ (990429)
(e) ‘. . . Mr Suen [Acting Chief Secretary for Administration] said the biggest problem was
the need to find a total of 6,000 hectares of land, almost five times the size of Chek Lap
Kok airport. . . .’ (990507sh)
(f) ‘. . . Secretary for Housing Dominic Wong Shing-wah said: “It means a new town of
the size of Junk Bay will have to be developed every two years to cope with the
influx.” . . .’ (990507sf)

The government and its allies try to scare and mislead the public into believing
that the acceptance of Mainland immigrants would lead to an uncontrollable
situation and, most importantly, the interests and privileges of the local people
would be adversely affected. In this way, the government, through its statements
mediated by the mass media such as the SCMP, hopes to win public support in its
campaign to expel the right-of-abode seekers.
Regarding the types of threat to the interests of the dominant group, those that are found in our data are, in general, not unlike those reported in research on discriminatory discourse elsewhere, for example, unwanted burden on resources and social welfare, adverse impact on education and housing, and the accentuation of unemployment and social problems, including the prediction of social unrest. What is perhaps unique about our Hong Kong data is the alleged pressure on land, as shown by the officials’ claims in excerpts (e) and (f). This is understandably a public concern given the small size and very high population density of Hong Kong.

Predicting threat to public order and political stability  Built upon a capitalist and commercial basis, Hong Kong has always emphasized its political stability and observance of the rule of law. A threat to either of these pillars of society would represent an alarm signal to the public. The government was quick to manipulate these threats to incite public emotion and provoke a sense of crisis towards the ‘influx’ issue. The following are examples of the SCMP’s reporting of the government’s predictions on the projected impact on the society’s order and stability:

(a) ‘Warning of II [illegal immigrant] influx if SAR loses test case; Talks held with mainland officials: Officials have warned of a possible influx of illegal immigrants if the Government loses a test case this month. . . . [Secretary for Security Regina Ip Lau Suk-yee said] “. . . there will be a message sent that it is difficult for the Government to conduct repatriation or it is very easy to obtain legal aid to challenge the Government. This will attract more people to come.” . . .’ (990310) [double headline + body]

(b) ‘“. . . it would also encourage the activities of snakeheads [smugglers of illegal immigrants] and adversely affect those waiting to comply with procedures,” the judge said. . . .’ (990404)

(c) ‘Organized smuggling of IIs [illegal immigrants] “on the rise”: . . . snakeheads use the abode ruling as an excuse to create an illegal immigration wave. . . .’ (990720)

In these reports, vivid predictions are made regarding various threats to the well-being of the people in Hong Kong. They all aim at inciting panic and anxiety among the general public. In reporting the pronouncements of the government and its allies in such a way, the SCMP at the same time reproduces the government’s position.

Predictions bearing on adverse consequences such as a projected increase in illegal immigrants are certainly not unique to Hong Kong. What seems unusual in our data is the indication that the governments and jurisdictions on both sides of the border show a strong willingness to cooperate in their efforts to stamp the tide of population movements – a characteristic which arguably owes its origin to the unparalleled socio-political model of decolonization called ‘one country, two systems’.

Use of quasi-objective figures  The use of ‘quasi-objective figures’ is one of ‘the most compelling scare tactics in the formation of public opinion’ (van Dijk, 1993b: 107). To supplement its scare tactics, the Hong Kong government exploited this
strategy in order to manipulate public reaction to the right-of-abode issue. The
government cited estimates and survey statistics to make the public believe that
the immigrants were going to financially drain the SAR government, that is, the
taxpayers’ money. These estimates, it was subsequently agreed by many experts,
were wildly exaggerated. Further serving to dramatize the situation, the figures
were widely used in headlines by the SCMP, with the maximum estimate usually
cited:

(a) Court gives 1.67m right of abode (990429)
(b) Extra $300m may be needed for migrants (990502)
(c) $710b (needed) for migrants in 10 years (990507sh)
(d) Taxpayers face $28b bill to provide new schools (990507sd)
(e) $270b bill for new networks (990507se)
(f) 170,000 flats needed in three years (990507sf)
(g) Influx may send jobless rate spiralling to 25% (990507sc)

It did not take long for the impact of the scare tactics employed by the government
and surveys to make itself felt in the immediate response of the public. Two sur-
veys were conducted shortly after the release of government estimates to poll
public opinion about the purported influx:

‘... more than 60% of people object to the expected influx of mainland migrants,
according to a new survey [the Hong Kong University’s Social Science Research
Centre polled 519 people] ... 44% saying their main concern was unemployment, fol-
lowed by 12% citing fears for public order and 11% concerns about housing and edu-
cation. . .' (990510)

‘Survey shows most opposed to influx of mainland children: . . . 60% of 1003 respon-
dents polled opposed allowing those with right of abode to come to the SAR. . . . 76%
believed Hong Kong should not shoulder the financial burden caused by their arrival.
. . . [a poll conducted by the Better Hong Kong Foundation]’ (990513)

These survey results indicate that some of the people in Hong Kong had already
developed a strong sense of crisis within a short period after the government had
presented its alarmist figures and statistics. The reporting of these survey results
by the SCMP is likely to have further reinforced negative feelings towards the
migrants and further naturalized such attitudes. The scaremongering propagated
by the use of quasi-objective figures in our data is very much in line with findings
in discriminatory discourse reported elsewhere.

BLAMING THE VICTIM
Scapegoating In search of a defence for its irresponsible reaction, the government
found an easy and immediate scapegoat in the target group – the Mainland
migrants. This is the strategy of ‘blaming the victim’, which Gruber (1997)
describes as the extreme form of scapegoating and which Wodak (1997) calls the
‘victim–perpetrator inversion’. From the standpoint of the government, the
Mainland immigrants are to blame for causing all kinds of problems to the Hong Kong community and thus should be kept out or expelled. Accusations against this minority group made by the government, as reported in the SCMP, are rather direct and far-reaching as illustrated in the following examples:

. . . Kwan Wai-wah of the Progressive Alliance of Hong Kong [a pro-government party] . . . was worried the SAR might not cope with a sudden influx of ‘hundreds of thousands of immigrants’. He pointed to the influx of mainlanders in the 1980s, which led to the bloom of squatter areas. . . . (990131)

Right-of-abode ruling puts housing target in jeopardy: Tung Chee-hwa’s pledge to cut needy families’ wait for public housing to three years could fall flat, housing officials admit. . . . Acting Business Director Fung Ho-tong said yesterday the ruling [the Court of Final Appeal’s right-of-abode ruling] could lengthen the waiting list. . . . (990207)

. . . ‘tens of thousands of mainland residents settling in Hong Kong will cause a rapid increase in population and the unemployment rate, and a more crowded living environment, . . . the problem of hillside squatters may also reappear and education and medical facilities may not be able to meet the demands of a substantially larger population . . . there is a possibility that our environment, and the present ecological balance may be badly affected too,’ Secretary for Security Regina Ip said. . . . (990429)

. . . He [Government economist Tang Kwong-yiu] predicted a surge in the already record jobless rate – 6.2 percent – starting next year with the arrival of the first migrants. The second generation of mainland people would push the rate up again by 12 percentage points seven years later, he said. . . . (990507sc)

An influx of mainland migrants could prompt a new brain drain, a survey revealed. . . . Nearly 80% of respondents said more people would emigrate if social and economic conditions deteriorated after the arrival of migrants. . . . (990508)

These are actually not facts but projections based on the possible outcome of the ‘influx’ of Mainland immigrants. The government’s purpose is to divert attention from the humanitarian issues involved and to put the blame on the Mainland migrants so that it will not be held responsible. Apart from blaming the victim, the government goes further, projecting the Hong Kong community as the victim if it accepted the ‘influx’. By reporting on the government’s predictions and projections, wittingly or unwittingly, the SCMP becomes an ally of the government in helping to naturalize these ideas.

Most of the accusations made against the Mainland immigrants are not unlike those reported in the literature. For example, Mainland immigrants are to blame for ‘the bloom of squatter areas’, ‘a rapid increase in population and the unemployment rate’, ‘a more crowded living environment’, a ‘record jobless rate’, and the alleged lengthening of the list of needy people waiting their turn for government housing. There is, however, one projected consequence which is fairly specific to the Hong Kong context and which we have therefore not found in the literature, namely, the possibility of ‘a new brain drain’. That this could be the case may be explained by the fact that many educated Hong Kong Chinese are upwardly and outwardly mobile professionals, as shown in the successive waves
of emigration – primarily to Anglophone countries – in the decade leading to the handover (Flowerdew, 1998; Li, in press).

**Positive discrimination/self-justification** Positive discrimination/self-justification develops when a dominant group accuses a minority group of being a burden on the social resources as an attempt to justify their discriminatory behaviour or attitude (van Dijk, 1993b: 264). In the right-of-abode crisis, some government officials and public figures – their voices again reproduced by the SCMP – blamed the Mainland immigrants for putting a heavy burden on the various resources of Hong Kong and also for causing social problems:

... She [Secretary for Security Regina Ip Lau Suk-yee] said the ruling would, in the long term, affect community life and put pressure on resources such as education, health and housing. ... (990130sc)

The Court of Final Appeal ruling on residency rights for mainland-born children will be a burden on resources. Acting Chief Executive Anson Chan Fang On-sang says. ... (990131)

... [a] large influx of new immigrants to Hong Kong will be an unbearable burden in terms of education, medical facilities, housing and general social welfare arrangements,' Mr Justice Wally Yeung warns. ... (990404)

An extra $300 million may have to be spent on the handling of applications by mainlanders who have the immediate right to migrate to Hong Kong, according to the immigration chief. ... (990502)

... Government economist Tang Kwong-yiu said mass immigration would ‘pull down the standard of living, wage levels’, push up unemployment and thin out resources for economic development and improvement of living conditions. ... (990507sh)

... Thirteen residential estates with more than 4,000 flats each would have to be built each year for the expected 1.67 million arrivals, according to government estimates. The result would be that needy families would have to wait at least 10 years for a public low-rental flat and taxpayers would have to pay an extra $288 billion for housing over the next 10 years. ... (990507sf)

The government officials’ predictions on the possible burden to be brought about by the Mainland immigrants’ influx gradually reinforce the belief that the Hong Kong community as a whole will suffer, and that the Mainland immigrants should be held responsible. This strategy plays an important role in shifting the responsibility and, at the same time, serves to justify the discriminatory attitude of the Hong Kong Government and the Hongkongers (the majority group).

**Distortion** To inflate the issue of immigration into a problematic one that threatens the well-being of the local residents, some public figures presented a distorted picture, which was again reproduced by the SCMP, of the impact of the influx on the local community. Although this strategy is not common in our data, reports of public figures indirectly making use of distortion in their presentation of
survey data and opinions do occur. The following citations, for example, present highly unlikely scenarios:

(a) ’Nearly 85% of women are worried the court ruling will have a negative effect on men’s fidelity, a survey by a women’s group [the Women’s Rights Concern Alliance] has found. . . . 88.2% said the judgment would lead to an increase in marital disputes . . . . 84.2% were also worried the judgment. . . .would have an impact on monogamy. . . . “The judgement indirectly acknowledges Hong Kong people taking second wives in the mainland,” the alliance said. . . .’ (990303sd)

(b) ‘“. . . allowing them [mainland immigrants] to stay would lead to chaos . . . [and] would result in many thousands of visitors on two-way permits refusing to go back and may prompt the mainland to prevent ‘innocent’ people making trips to Hong Kong, damaging the tourist industry . . .” Mr Justice Yeung warns. . . .’ (990331)

What is problematized in the distorted picture of our Hong Kong data is, to say the least, untypical of studies on discriminatory discourse strategies elsewhere. For example, Hong Kong Chinese men’s infidelity to their spouses is blown up beyond reasonable proportions. The alleged ‘impact on monogamy’ is based on an opinion survey the methodology of which is suspect and the reliability questionable, and yet, reported uncritically in a newspaper of the stature of SCMP, the figures give the appearance of being objective and real. As for the other problematized issue – that the Hong Kong tourist industry will suffer as a result of the Mainland government’s tightening of visa control because visitors from the Mainland on two-way permits would refuse to go back – is a wild guess at best, and yet, quoted verbatim from Mr Justice Yeung in an SCMP news story, these projections take on a higher rate of credibility than what one person’s private opinion deserves. By reporting uncritically and citing directly the distorted predictions and inflated figures, therefore, the SCMP reproduces and perpetuates a discriminatory stance and, at the same time, indirectly reinforces the allegation that there is no legitimate basis for Mainland immigrants to claim right-of-abode in Hong Kong.

DELEGITIMATION

Delegitimation is employed to outcast a minority group, resulting in the minority group being outlawed as illegitimate. Van Dijk’s description of problematization is similar to the strategy of delegitimation. He regards the strategy as a tactic to discredit any voices or policies in favour of the minority group by means of problematizing issues related to them, such as immigration problem, right-of-abode and cultural conflicts. Delegitimation is realized through two major, related strategies, as exemplified in the following excerpts.

Pointing to illegitimate status and illegal activities associated with the target group

(a) ‘Abode migrants told to leave’        (990331) [Headline]
(b) ‘“They have no right of abode in Hong Kong under the Basic Law. They have no right to enter Hong Kong illegally or to remain in Hong Kong in breach of the conditions of stay”, he [Mr. Justice Yeung] added.’        (990331)
In our data, various claims are found to outlaw the minority group as an illegitimate group having no right-of-abode in Hong Kong. One set of claims points to the fact that the abode-seekers entered Hong Kong illegally, either through organized smuggling of humans or overstaying upon expiry of their two-way permits, as shown in the words of Mr Justice Yeung in excerpt (a). Another set of claims alleges that granting Mainland immigrants the right-of-abode would unleash illegal activities associated with the minority group, notably an increase in organized smuggling of humans and ‘IIs’ (illegal immigrants) by snakeheads. Still other claims draw attention to the status of the children who were born to ‘concubines’ in the Mainland. Thus in many news stories, negative attributes such as ‘illegitimate children’, ‘born out of wedlock’ and ‘DNA testing required’ reinforce public scepticism of the legitimacy of the Mainland immigrants’ claim to right-of-abode – the last mentioned being the result of the Hong Kong government’s decree that DNA test results were required of all child immigrants seeking right-of-abode in Hong Kong as a means to ascertain the parent–child blood relations.

Mediating and magnifying voices opposed to the minority group  Another discursive strategy through which the legitimacy of the abode-seekers’ right to stay is undermined is found in the voices – mediated and to some extent magnified by SCMP in its news stories – of those who were opposed to the abode-seekers’ claims. Among the voices mediated were those of the Beijing authorities, Hong Kong government officials and some unidentified Hongkongers as shown in local opinion polls.

(a) ‘Beijing says abode ruling was wrong and should be changed’ (990209) [lead]
(b) ‘The landmark Court of Final Appeal ruling on right of abode was a mistake and should be changed, a mainland official said yesterday.’ (990209)
(c) ‘Court wrong on abode, NPC told Judges should have consulted Beijing before issuing ruling, meeting hears’ (990623) [Headline]
(d) ‘Local Standing Committee member Tsang Hin-chi dispelled fears the reinterpretation would undermine the power of, and public confidence in, the final court. “[It’s all right] if the court doesn’t make a mistake next time”, he said.’ (990623)
(e) ‘During the meeting, Miss [Elsie] Leung said that she considered “clarification” to be a kind of rectification. Her remark came after Democratic Party chairman Martin Lee Chu-ming asked her about Beijing’s call for rectification which preceded the Government’s request to the Court of Final Appeal for it to clarify part of its January 29 judgment on right of abode for mainland children.’ (990306)
Most people support blocking the mass influx either through an NPC interpretation or amendment of the Basic Law, a survey published yesterday showed. Only 16.2 percent of respondents said the Court of Final Appeal ruling should be upheld. The remaining 83.8 percent said either an interpretation or an amendment of the Basic Law by Beijing best met the interests of Hong Kong, according to the poll of 980 people conducted by the Hong Kong Policy Research Institute.

Survey shows most opposed to influx of mainland children

As shown in these excerpts, some legal experts from Beijing openly called the Court of Final Appeal’s (CFA) ruling a ‘mistake’, while Elsie Leung, Head of the Hong Kong judiciary, was quoted as echoing Beijing’s view that the CFA ruling needed to be ‘rectified’. Such official voices of the authorities were mingled with a third type of voice – the voice of a ‘faceless majority’ projected and magnified in results of local opinion polls reported at more or less regular intervals. In effect, to the concerned reader of SCMP, it is as if the reporting of the abode crisis was punctuated by a refrain of several well-orchestrated unsympathetic voices, questioning and challenging the legitimacy of the Mainland immigrants’ claim to right-of-abode.

**Discussion and conclusion**

The above analysis has demonstrated that examples of all of the discriminatory discourse strategies in the composite taxonomy presented earlier in this article are to be found in our corpus of news articles taken from the SCMP regarding the right-of-abode of Mainland immigrants. The taxonomies of discriminatory strategies used to account for data collected in other places (mostly Europe) are thus applicable also in Hong Kong, with some local characteristics. Although this finding does not allow us to claim by any means that these strategies are universal, it does indicate that they occur in the Asian, as well as the European, context. Perhaps more significantly, it applies to people belonging to the same ethnic background, largely as a result of a negative-othering, stereotypical portrayal of Chinese Mainlanders in the Hong Kong popular media, which helps account for Chinese Hongkongers’ general indifference to the plight of immigrants from the Mainland.

This study is a modest attempt to unfold the underlying attitudes and ideologies of the SCMP and reveal the intra-ethnic relations between the Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese. By the definition of van Dijk (1997), the practice of discrimination in the SCMP is an ‘intragroup discourse about others’. The SCMP, a prestigious newspaper in Hong Kong, plays a significant role in the reporting of the right-of-abode issue. In its reports, the SCMP turns out to be the mouthpiece of the government and the establishment in reproducing its anti-migrant rhetoric. It serves as a medium through which the government and its associates are able to freely disseminate their prejudice and discrimination against the Mainland migrants. The intra-group ethnic relation is one of division and dichotomy between the majority (the Hong Kong residents) and the minority groups (the
right-of-abode seekers). The discourse of discrimination, as reproduced in the SCMP, serves to reinforce this intragroup division and discrimination.

Another interesting conclusion in this study points towards the difference between fact-oriented and opinion-oriented texts in the newspaper. Gruber concludes from his study on the rhetoric of trivialization in Austria’s most popular tabloid that both fact-oriented and opinion-oriented texts demonstrate a general tendency of trivialization and disavowal of the minority group (1997: 154), that is, a discriminatory attitude. Our study has focused on fact-oriented articles, but if we consider the editorials of the SCMP on the right-of-abode issue, we find its stance to be relatively more sympathetic towards the Mainland immigrants than its characterization in the news reports. Although most of the editorials on the right-of-abode issue focus on the threat to the rule of law posed by the central government’s over-ruling of Hong Kong Court of the Final Appeal’s verdict, the editor does criticize the prejudicial attitudes of the government towards the Mainland migrants. The following are quotations from three of the six editorials published on the right-of-abode issue in the SCMP:

(a) SENSE OF URGENCY . . . Confused mainlanders continue to pour into the Immigration Department seeking clarifications that are still not available. Across the border, meanwhile, snakeheads are taking advantage of the prolonged uncertainty to lure more illegal immigrants to Hong Kong. . . . Every day of delay means another day in which such problems can only continue to mount. But yesterday’s first meeting of the government taskforce to implement the court’s decision displayed little sign of the urgency with which this issue needs to be addressed. . . . To date, the only tangible consequence of the judgment seems to be that Beijing has banned those potentially affected from even visiting Hong Kong on two-way permits. This means that their rights are now more restricted than before the court ruled in their favour. If this continues to be the case, some are sure to bring applications for judicial review which would stand a high chance of success. . . . But when the legal rights of Hong Kong permanent residents are involved, the administration has a duty to do all it can to accelerate the process. . . . (990206)

(b) AMENDING THE LAW . . . It [the number of abode seekers settling in Hong Kong] will not, however, be on the scale of the Government’s doomsday scenario. Considerable realignment is necessary. . . . There are other examples of this tendency to concentrate on the negative aspects of migration, and to overplay the SAR’s inability to cope. No account is taken of the construction and service industry jobs it will help to generate and there is no acknowledgment that migrants will help to offset skill shortages, nor of their contribution to the economy. . . . But there is no disguising a taint of unabashed prejudice against mainland migrants which is not pleasant. It would be the subject of great criticism if it was voiced against Chinese elsewhere in the world. . . . It would amount to the NPC overriding the Court of Final Appeal ruling, and would rob Hong Kong of its promised autonomy, as well as severely damaging its common law jurisdiction. . . . It is local NPC delegates who are apparently content to surrender Hong Kong’s autonomy, so long as it stems the ‘tidal wave’. . . . (990507)

(c) STAR PUPILS . . . The upheaval involved in adjusting to a strange city and encountering, it must be said, an often hostile reception, raises the stress by several notches
. . . . Fomenting antagonism against migrants, as is happening now, is irresponsible and potentially harmful . . . but it is unity of purpose which will solve the problem. A ‘them and us’ culture will only make the problem worse. (990512)

These editorial extracts indicate that the SCMP tries to uphold a relatively sympathetic and understanding attitude in its editorials (opinion-oriented texts) towards the migrants. Unlike the populist Austrian tabloid, the SCMP, read as it is by members of the elite classes in a quasi-democratic society, adopts a liberal and democratic stance in its editorials on the right-of-abode issue. The interesting question is whether the discriminatory attitude, as manifested in the news articles, or the more tolerant tone of the editorials, represents the true institutional ideology of this prestigious English language newspaper.

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NOTES

1. The reference to the source of the news article consists of six digits showing the year, month and day, in that order. Thus ‘(990203)’ would mean ‘on February 3, 1999’. Where more than one news article is found on a particular date, the articles are sequenced as follows: ‘sc’ stands for the first article, ‘sd’ the second, ‘se’ the third, and so forth. Thus ‘(990429sc)’ refers to the first article on April 29, 1999, whereas ‘(990429sd)’ denotes the second article appearing on that same date.

REFERENCES


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