Analyzing the Portrayal of the Desired National Identity of the Tibetan Ethnicity in China’s Propaganda

WU Chen

M. Phil. Thesis

Hong Kong Baptist University

December 2010
China’s national identity construction toward Tibet is considered to have failed, after the riots in 2008. This research examined the propaganda toward Tibet in the post-1989 period, in the purpose of discovering the problems in national identity construction over the Tibet ethnicity. The problem was explored step by step: 1) identify the patterns of key frames in the post-1989 period; 2) examine whether the propaganda featured multiculturalism, as claimed by China’s government; 3) find out if Tibetans were portrayed as in-group members in each dimension of identity constructions; and 4) test if the conceptualized non-positive portrayals were signified in out-group identifications. Applying Matthes & Kohring’s (2008) content analysis method and Brady’s timeline (2008), 3534 news clips sampled from two mainstream daily newspapers in Tibet, were content analyzed. Results show that during the post-1989 period, the image of China is a nation kept depowering Tibetans in governance. The claimed multiculturalism appeared to be narrowly-defined, which limited in economic development related issues. Results also show that the in-group portrayals of Tibetans on the national level were significantly different with that on the ethnic level in ethnic identity achievement and ethnic behavior practice dimensions, which are the major parts of the national identity constructions in China’s propaganda. Finally, the conceptualized non-positive portrayals were identified and argued that they may induce Tibetans’ out-group identifications.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION....................................................................................................................i

ABSTRACT......................................................................................................................ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................................... iii

TABLE OF CONTENTS ............................................................................................. iv

LIST OF TABLES .........................................................................................................vii

LIST OF FIGURES .......................................................................................................viii

LIST OF APPENDICES .............................................................................................. ix

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION .....................................................................................1

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW .........................................................................5

2.1 China’s Tibet Policy .............................................................................................. 5

2.1.1 Ambiguous definition between nation and ethnicity ................................. 5

2.1.2 History of the relationship between the central government and Tibetans ....................................................................................................................7

2.1.3 Nation-ethnicity frames in the name of a supreme ethnicity of Chunghua .....................................................................................................................13

2.1.5. Multiculturalism claims in China’s Tibet Policy ..................................... 16

2.2 Tibet Issue in China’s Propaganda .................................................................... 21

2.2.1 A powerful propaganda system in China ............................................... 21

2.2.2 Brady’s timeline of China’s propaganda transformation after 1989 ....... 24

2.2.3 Controversial and consensus issues in Tibet ............................................ 28

2.2.3.1 Controversial issues ........................................................................ 28

2.2.3.2 Consensus issues ........................................................................... 29

2.2.3.3 Controversial and consensus issues are comparatively defined .31

2.3 Conceptualization of Measurement on Identity Constructions .................... 31

2.3.1 Social Identity Theory of in-group vs. out-group arguments ................. 32

2.3.2 Psychological dimensions of national identity and ethnic identity ...... 34

2.3.2.1 National Identity Dimensions (NATID) .................................... 34
2.3.2.2. Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM) ..............................36
2.3.3 Desired identity construction efforts for in-group portrayals ..........37
2.3.4 Identifying non-positive portrayals according to SIT & empowerment theory ............................................................................................................39
2.4 Summary of Research Questions and Hypotheses ........................41

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY .....................................................................44
3.1 Research Design: Longitudinal Content Analysis on Daily Newspapers ..44
3.2 Sampling ................................................................................................45
3.3 Creating Coding Book .........................................................................45
  3.3.1 Employing Matthes & Kohring’s device for defining frames in propaganda ............................................................................................................45
  3.3.2 Elaboration of the coding book in this study .........................48
    3.3.2.1 Sub-variables generated for Matthe & Kohring’s device ...48
    3.3.2.2 Extra variable on identity construction efforts (psychological dimensions) ........................................48
    3.3.2.3 Inter-coder reliability of the code book ..........................51
  3.4 Analysis Plan ......................................................................................52
    3.4.1 Extracting key frames with hieratical cluster analysis ...............53
    3.4.2 Variance of coefficients of cluster analysis across the six periods ....54
    3.4.3 Different pattern of distribution of portrayals at the two levels ....54
    3.4.4. The presence of the non-positive portrayals in controversial and consensus issues ............................................................................................................55

CHAPTER IV. RESULTS ..................................................................................57
4.1 Description of the Sample .................................................................57
4.2 Patterns of China’s Propaganda toward Tibet over Post-1989 Period ..57
4.3 Variance of Coefficients of Cluster Analysis across the Six Periods ........66
4.4 Different Patterns of Distribution on the Two Levels of ICE ..........67
4.5 Frequency of the Presence of non-positive portrayals in Controversial and
CHAPTER V. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION ..................................................71

5.1 Discussion of Results ......................................................................................71

5.1.1 In China’s propaganda, Tibetans are virtually depowered in governance in Tibet by the central government .............................................................72

5.1.2 The claimed multiculturalism was narrowly-defined and practiced limited to economic development related issues.................................................73

5.1.3 China’s propagandized national identity didn’t portray Tibetans as in-group members in some of the identity dimensions, which takes up the major part of the coverages .................................................................74

5.1.4 China’s propaganda is dominated by non-positive portrayals which may elicit Tibetans’ rejection to the national identity ........................................75

5.1.5 General Discussion ....................................................................................76

5.2 Limitations of the Study .................................................................................77

5.3 Suggestions for Future Studies ........................................................................78

5.4 Conclusion ......................................................................................................79

REFERENCES........................................................................................................81

APPENDICES .........................................................................................................92

CURRICULUM VITAE............................................................................................108