

Sally Liangni Liu

Chinese Language Media - Views on the Treaty & Maori

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Contact: (09) 373 7599 ext 87884; liangni.liu@auckland.ac.nz

“Chinese language media – views on the Treaty and Maori”. Today, my presentation is based on some of the results of my Master thesis research. This research is about new Chinese migrants’ perceptions towards Maori and Maori-related issues, and the likely influence of Chinese media’s representation of Maori issues on the formation of new Chinese migrants’ perceptions towards Maori and Maori-related issues.

This study includes two parts. The first part is a media content analysis of Maori-related news reports in Chinese media. The second part is a quantitative survey on new Chinese migrants’ perceptions towards Maori and related-issues and their patterns of media consumption and evaluation of Chinese media.

The sampling period to collect Chinese media material was five months, from October 2004 to March 2005. During these five months, I surveyed more than ten local Chinese newspapers and magazines, one Chinese news talkback programme and some local-based Chinese language websites. Maori-related news reports and information in these three types of media during the five months were collected and analysed. The *New Zealand Herald* was also included in this media content analysis only for comparison purpose.

Here are the news topics which are Treaty issue-related I identified during these five months: debate of the ownership of lakebed and air space, the Foreshore and Seabed legislation, Waitangi Day 2005 and issues surrounding *Te Wananga o Aotearoa*.

This media content analysis firstly found that Chinese media rely on mainstream media heavily for Maori-related information. They produced their papers by “cut-and-paste” techniques, which means direct translation from mainstream media. During the sampling period, 33 out of 35 Maori-related articles were produced by the “cut-and-paste” technique. The consequence of applying this method to produce Maori news is that Chinese media may inherit “potted” views of the mainstream media towards Maori and related issues. As previous studies show that Maori-related news reports in New Zealand mainstream media tend to be biased, one would expect those translated reports in Chinese media to reflect those biases.

Maori-related issues are also seriously under-represented in Chinese media. During the sampling period, compared with more than 130 Maori news reports in *New Zealand Herald*, there were about 35 Maori-related reports in the Chinese print media. Previous studies show that Maori and related-issues are under-represented in New Zealand mainstream media. With fewer reports of Maori in Chinese media, it is fair to say that Maori are further under-represented. In that radio news talkback programme, Maori-related issues were only mentioned 9 times during 5 months and there were only 3 audience call-ins to discuss those issues. On this Chinese language website (www.Chinese.net.nz), there were only 12 Maori-related messages during the same period.

“Maori news are bad news”. This comment was used in some previous research reports to describe New Zealand mainstream media’s representation of Maori and related issues. In my research, I found that Chinese media show similar attitudes in reporting Maori news. In this media content analysis, I also counted the number of negative news items, neutral ones and positive ones. Amongst those 35 Maori news reports in the Chinese print media, 32 are negative items, 1 neutral, and only 2 positive. I also found that some stereotypical images of Maori were heavily run in that news talkback programme and some Chinese websites.

There is a lack of Maori voice in Chinese media. When certain Maori-related issue raised debate among public domain and media circle, Chinese media did not give equal weight to both sides of the debate, and the voice of Maori is often neglected. For example, when reporting the debate of the ownership of lakebed and air space

above Lake Taupo, what Chinese media focused on was how much the Tuwharetoa Maori Trust Board had received and how the commercial tourism activities were affected. Actually, the lake deal was based on the Waitangi Tribunal's ruling, but such information was not provided. There is also a lack of relevant historical background information in Chinese media. Headline-oriented/even-oriented news dominated the Maori news reports in Chinese media, while detailed historical and social background information was omitted. Other forms of reporting Maori news, such as editorial articles, is also lacking in Chinese print media. During the sampling period, only two editorial articles appeared in Chinese print media. In media scholarship, we often regard the editorial article as a main source which may provide in-depth historical and social background information to readers and may facilitate readers' fair understanding of a whole issue. With the lack of Maori voice and background information, it is fair to say that most of the time, Chinese readers may only get partial information and cannot understand the story fully.

Now let's look at some problematic editorial views on the Treaty issues. These two quotations were taken from one editorial article reporting on the *Wananga* issue. Through discourse content analysis, we can see that these words seemed to reflect the author's own judgments and opinions. The interpretation of the *Wananga* issue seemed to be based on the author's own understanding and perspectives. My question is "is such interpretation appropriate"?

Just now we spent some time on Chinese media's portray of Maori, but how about Chinese readers' reaction to Chinese media? This table shows that Chinese audiences are well aware of the negative reports of Maori news. Like what I talked about before, the media content analysis shows that the representation of Maori-related issues tend to be negative in Chinese media. Here, the Chinese audience survey once again confirms the negative reports of Maori news in Chinese media. But interestingly, 24% participants found that Chinese media report on Maori were impartial and objective. The extrapolation is: if the actual representation of Maori and related issues in Chinese media tends to be negative and biased, Chinese audiences may regard these biased reports as true.

This table shows that a large number of participants believe the information provided by the Chinese media is useful. If Chinese media is seen as a useful information source, their representation of Maori might be one of information sources of new Chinese migrants perceptions towards Maori.

This is another example from a Chinese BBS website. Users of such website can read and submit messages on this public electronic board. As you can see, this user discussed the Maori Party's performance in this year's general election. Then somebody read it and replied below. Let's focus on the green highlighted parts. I translated them as key points here. We can see that this user takes a negative view against Maori Treaty claims.

It seems that the research results provide some discomfort to us, but there are also some positive findings. Continuing with this BBS message, another user joined the discussion and expressed his/her opinion. The subject line is "please speak after you have learned New Zealand history and politics". The full text is "Maori land claim is similar to China claiming back Hong Kong. We Chinese know that Hong Kong, a piece of colonial land, should be claimed back, shouldn't the same principle apply to Maori's Treaty claim? Moreover, Maori have been on this land for more than one thousand years. They are the *Tangata Whenua* of this country, and here is their home. This user showed some critical thinking and provided another angle to view the Treaty positively. That is encouraging.

My research results are almost here. Even though the results are a little bit off-putting, but I think that the important thing is to look at the indication of this study. When the new Chinese migrants, many of them skilled migrants, came to New Zealand with limited knowledge of Maori culture and Treaty issues. But they do want to know more about indigenous issues. My previous qualitative interviews do show that some younger Chinese are politically aware of Maori's Treaty rights, and are very interested in indigenous issues. On the other hand, as the audience survey discussed above suggested, new Chinese migrants do rely on ethnic Chinese media heavily for information. In the modern urban setting, such as Auckland, individuals and different ethnic groups, including new Chinese migrants have limited chances to have social contact with other ethnic groups. This confers significant power to ethnic Chinese

media in influencing the ways how new Chinese migrants perceive other ethnic groups, including Maori. In terms of reporting Treaty and Maori issues, ideally, these Chinese media may provide opportunities for new Chinese migrants to better understand indigenous issues, thus assist with the peaceful coexist between Maori and Chinese communities. On the other hand, these media may also encourage in-group solidarity and over-emphasize the nature of boundaries between Maori and Chinese communities. As such, the acknowledgement of the challenges facing Chinese media is the first step to making future improvements.