

Preface

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<https://doi.org/10.1075/bct.42.01chi>

Pages vii–ix of

**Discourse and Socio-political Transformations in
Contemporary China**

Edited by Paul Chilton, Hailong Tian and Ruth Wodak

[Benjamins Current Topics, 42] 2012. ix, 150 pp.

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Preface

Paul Chilton, Hailong Tian and Ruth Wodak

This volume originally appeared as a special issue of *Journal of Language and Politics* (2010, 9:4). It was then an outcome of a three-year (2006-2009) research project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust, which we conducted at Lancaster University in association with Nankai University and Tianjin University of Commerce. Since then, the network built on the New Discourses in Contemporary China (NDCC) project has (and will) become enlarged and strengthened by new activities such as the 4th NDCC conference held in Guangdong University of Foreign Studies in 2011, and still another conference to be held in Nanjing Normal University in 2013. In addition, the research topics that developed from the NDCC project have been explored in depth by scholars both within and outside China. and further publications are anticipated.

The reasons for conducting such a research project and eventually devoting a collection to China scarcely need to be given these days. Everyone acknowledges that China's opening up to the West, its extraordinary economic rise, and the internal and global issues that these developments represent, are an object of huge interest and concern. This volume focuses on one aspect of the contemporary Chinese phenomenon, one that is not so well studied in the mainstream departments of International Relations, Political Science, Economics, and so on. What we are concerned with is so obvious that it is generally ignored — that politics, society and transformation are the product of myriad collective linguistic interchanges, some stabilised, some competing, some agonistic, some new and emerging. All the contributors to this volume thus invoke various notions of “discourse” and varying notions of “discourse analysis”, including “critical discourse analysis”.

The project of studying the many dimensions of a society's ongoing transition is dauntingly complex, not least because analytic terms do not translate in a straightforward way across languages and cultures. This is, for example, the case for the English (and European) term *critical*. Our opening chapter thus seeks to open a scholarly debate among Chinese and Western scholars around this focal concept.

Over the past thirty years, Chinese government discourse has evolved along with its social and economic policy. The resultant impact on social structure has been what might almost call revolutionary. Qing Zhang's chapter addresses the past thirty years of evolving discourse. Using fusion of Natural History of Discourse (NHD) perspective developed by US scholars and predominantly European CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis), Zhang analyses the textualisation and re-textualisation of dominant discourses of social stratification in China.

The next three chapters adopt a more specific focus on aspects of socio-economic transformation in contemporary China. Yi Li's chapter uses techniques of recording and analysis essentially based on ethnographic data collection and the tools of Conversation Analysis (CA). Its focus is on government-sponsored help agencies, a new institution that has emerged as a part of a response to the stresses and strains experienced by new consumers who have lost some of the older support systems. The chapter by Ngai-Ling Sum illustrates a new approach, Cultural Political Economy (CPE) developed within the field of Politics and International Relations. The focus of attention in this case is primarily economic and also geographic: The Pearl River Delta, as one of the key areas of the Chinese economic entry into the world economy, and this is the location of Sum's analysis of the phenomenon of trans-national knowledge branding. As in the West, the marketization of the economy in China has brought managerial methods into the educational sphere, with a consequent hybridisation of discourses and practices that were once more or less separate. Hailong Tian's chapter, which uses a broadly CDA approach, demonstrates this process in the case of the *genre* of "teaching quality assessment", revealing both the internal strategies of the assessment process itself and also its embedding in a nexus of media and other public discourses.

In the two final chapters of this collection we turn to discourses and discourse practices concerned with China's relationship to the international global political system. The first of these two chapters, by Zeshun You, Jianping Chen and Zhonghong, focuses again on *genre*, in this case the *genre* of the Chinese Government's *Annual Work Report* (AWR) to National People's Congress, which the authors analyse over the period 1993-2007, a period in which China sought increasingly to define and establish its role in the world, not only in relation to other nations but also in relation to its own domestic population. Using the more cognitive version of CDA found in the work of van Dijk, the authors show the dialectic relationship between existing and new discourses and how new discourse constantly reflects domestic social, economic and political conditions. The government's changing discourse on China's place in the world, in the context of previously constructed collective understanding of China's history and status, has, of course, to be propagated to the public. In the finale to this volume, Qing Cao's chapter examines in detail the 2006 Chinese TV blockbuster, *The Rise of the Great Powers*. Drawing

on Foucault, CDA and narrative theory, Cao is able to bring out the presence of an official re-interpretation of Western powers, a re-interpretation that is bound up with a new official interpretation of China's own standing in global politics. Significantly perhaps for the future of the public sphere in China, Cao also shows how this new projected self-image did not go without comment among China's intellectuals.

It is impossible to do justice to this enormous field in a single volume. Moreover, this volume represents an already growing wave of scholarship that is producing not only new analyses of the discourse of the Chinese transformation but is also producing new interpretative approaches. There are some scholars who are disconcerted by the importation of predominantly Western techniques of analysis and are concerned to develop an approach drawing the Chinese tradition. This is a volume that has been unable to include, but we wish to acknowledge its potential importance for future collaborative work between Chinese and Western scholars. In this volume, our aim is to call the attention of discourse and language analysts to the challenging research tasks that the development of social, political and intellectual life in China is opening up.

We wish to express our thanks to the contributors and also to those organisations and individuals who have made this intellectual project possible. In particular we are grateful to the Leverhulme Trust (grant number F/00 185/0), which funded the three-year project *New Discourses in Contemporary China* (NDCC). We also wish to express our thanks to Professor Maizeng Zhang, who was one of the initial coordinators of NDCC and who enabled us to launch the project at Nankai University in spring 2006 and supported NDCC at its subsequent conferences. Equally important has been the support of the Tianjin University of Commerce and President Shuhan Liu. We also thank Professor Yi Li for making possible our third conference at Nankai. In addition the project has been materially supported by the Institute of Advanced Studies and the China Management Centre, at Lancaster University, where the second NDCC conference was held in 2007.