On Migrant Workers' Social Status in Taiwan:
A Critical Analysis of Mainstream News Discourse

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It is estimated that around 20 million Southeast Asians work outside of their home country. In 1991, Taiwan first introduced about 3,000 migrant workers from Thailand. In mid-2015, there were approximately 579,000 migrant workers who came under the category of foreign laborers mainly from Southeast Asia. However, there is scarce research on representations of the south–south international migration. This study critically analyzes mainstream news discourse on migrant workers in Taiwan to discern their relations to their residing society. Four themes emerged: objectification of foreign laborers; differentiated and gendered marginalization; multilevel triangulations over migrant bodies; and imperialistic cultural attitudes toward migrant workers. Through omissions, inferences, and emphases on particular events in news reports, the migrant workers are in an impossible position to exist politically, economically, and culturally in Taiwanese society.

Keywords: Asia, discourse analysis, migration, newspapers, social positions

In 2013, there were 232 million migrants globally, which constitutes 3% of the world's population (Connor, Cohn, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2013). According to Hugo (2012), the demography of migration "has acquired an unprecedented scale and diversity. It is estimated that around 20 million Southeast Asians work outside of their home country . . . with the Philippines (4,500,000), Indonesia (6,000,000), Thailand (500,000), and Vietnam (500,000) as top nations" (pp. 392–400) sending migrant workers. These movements have impacts on cultural, societal, economic, and political relationships among individuals and groups globally. As the field of culture and communication continues attending to the impact of global movement and transnational interactions (e.g., Martin & Nakayama, 2013; Sorrells, 2013), it offers a unique perspective for an examination of the dynamic ways newcomers live as new residents with Taiwanese nationals.

Most communication research has focused on immigrants who relocate from the south and east to the north and west societies such as Australia, Canada, Europe, and the United States (Schemer, 2012). Research is scarce on south–south international migration practices and experiences, although the

Situation Report on International Migration in East and South-East Asia suggested "an almost 12-times amount of remittance increase from . . . 1990s to 2006" (International Office for Migration, 2008, p. 19), and Ratha and Shaw (2007) estimated that south–south remittances "amount to $55.4 billion in 2005" (p. 11). In addition, immigrants and migrants are employed interchangeably in the examinations of border-traveling interactions and representations of these lived experiences (with a few exceptions, such as Chávez, 2008). Studies in migrant research have primarily concerned policies and the labor rights of migrants rather than cultural representations of these newcomers (Asis, Piper, & Raghuram, 2009). This research locates a less discussed population—migrant workers in Asia—as many nation-states such as Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan have become new destinations for workers. Specifically, it analyzes news reports on migrant workers in Taiwan to discern their relationship to the society in which they reside.

Communication and International Migration

Research on international migration in the field of communication concentrates on two areas. One line of research sheds light on immigrants' media practices and consumption while fashioning identities in their newly settled locations. Through these self-making performances, migrants show resistance to constructions and representations that confine who they are and who they are becoming. Kama and Malka (2013) examined how Jewish Israelis in the United States consume news relating to their new environment and home country. Madianou (2014) analyzed how Filipino migrants in the United Kingdom use smartphones in their integration and relationship maintenance. Tosoni and Tarantino (2013) examined the urban conflict between Chinese migrants and Italian residents in Via Paolo Sarpi, Milan, and described the fluid space of transmedia in which dominant and resisting interpretations travel. Media outlets are empowering locales where migrant workers as minorities can re/imagine themselves after relocations (e.g., Alexandra, 2008; de Leeuw & Rydin, 2007; Kama, 2008).

The other body of communication scholarship has mostly concerned the influence that mainstream media have on public discourse in constructing their members and outcasts (e.g., Amaya, 2010; Flores, 2003; Jones, 2006; Ono & Sloop, 2002; Pineda & Sowards, 2007). Williamson (2014) articulated the ways that news media employ anti–Muslim immigrant racist rhetoric to invoke veils as signifiers for a "threat" and "danger" to British society and consequently attack multiculturalism. Race is the often-unnamed driving force, motivated by economic conditions that divide the desirable populations from others in Western societies. Yue (2012) interrogated Australian media practices that racialize and queer non-Western immigrants such as Indians at times while evoking progressive homonationalism for Asian transgender asylum seekers at other times. In the United States, the mainstream media simplify representations of immigrants from Latin American countries for audiences to consume without a substantial understanding of immigrant experiences (Amaya, 2010; Sowards & Pineda, 2013). These discourses portray certain bodies as dangerous and undesirable and their cultural values as deviant and alien (Inda, 2000). Relying on the racialized essence, the implications of framing Mexicans as foreign and illegal continued to later decades. As Chávez (2008) argued, Latino/as in the United States have been portrayed as "threats" to the United States, and such multilayered "translation" has drawn opposing responses from activist groups such as the Minutemen. The "dehumanizing process" to objectify Latina/os

as "alien, criminal, and parasite [*sic*]" in media presentations becomes "true" for many Americans who encounter Mexican migrants through these representations (pp. 22–23).

U.S. and European societies have been the focus of most studies and have included both immigrants and migrants without much distinction in the types of employment and visas, which influence the experiences these newcomers encounter in their new environments. Without being deterministic or fixating on the role of immigration papers, particular legal paths that individuals follow across national boundaries are not to be neglected or universalized because they suggest the amount and types of resources available (Cheng, 2008). The Asian region has become a significant location in which "labour migration is the dominant form of international migration" (Hugo, 2012, p. 392). Thus, examining the ways these migrants are represented and translated, to borrow Chávez's (2008) term, in public discourse will further our understanding of power, communication, and global movements.

International Migrant Workers in Asia

Research on migration in Asia provides rich information that includes the demographic changes of migrants and their experiences, immigration management, and policies from both governmental and nongovernmental agencies (Ajis, Saludin, Ismail, von Feigenblatt, & Keling, 2010; Kneebone, 2010), gender and human trafficking crises (Lan, 2008), and human and labor rights advocacy (Kessler, 2009). Pieke (2012) offers a synopsis of the types of migrants in China since the 1980s and their motivations and activities as well as the Chinese government's differential treatment of these foreigners depending on their visa status, skills, and means of entrance. Piper (1999) analyzed international migration with a specific focus on gender, labor division, and patriarchy. She argued for the need to examine driving forces, different motivations, and backgrounds of Southeast Asian women migrants as domestic or sex workers and bilateral governmental treatment and trafficking among nations such as Japan, Thailand, and the Philippines. Stemming from the concern over the "feminization of migration in Asia," Lindquist, Xiang, and Yeoh (2012) unpacked the central role of "brokers" situated in the web-like relations that constitute the political economy of migration.

Analyses of activism derived from a particular cultural and geopolitical context illuminate the rhetorical strategies used for labor and migrant rights. Kim (2009) highlighted how Korean foreign migrant labor rights activists successfully incorporated Korean moral elements into the international norms of human rights to avoid negating the strong sense of Korean national pride. Similarly, Lee (2012) analyzed a case study in which migrants of different nationalities in Korea collaborated and negotiated with one another and their Korean counterparts for migrant rights. Arguing that class instead of ethnicity served as the foundation that brought these various individuals to such an alliance, this research provides a rare case of "media activism" in which migrants are agents in making materials about themselves (Lee, 2012, p. 314). Similar activism is articulated in photos taken by migrant workers in Taiwan to express, critique, and continue their arduous daily life (Taiwan International Workers' Association, 2007). Life as a migrant worker is difficult, particularly when there is dispute and exploitation. So (2011) documented how recent technological developments such as social media afford migrants in Taiwan outlets to express their sorrow and connect with family and friends back home. Calbay and HayPinas.org (2012) analyzed homilies for Filipino migrant workers in Taiwan and concluded that the Catholic Church plays a cultural, symbolic, and

practical role in these migrants' struggles to make sense of their life of toil away from home.

Since 1991, four years after martial law was lifted, Taiwan has faced an intense need for labor for public projects and has introduced "3,105 foreign workers" (Ma, 2011, p. 354) from Thailand. In March 2014, according to Taiwan's National Immigration Agency (2014), there were about 452,000 foreign workers as legal residents who came under the category of foreign laborers for the so-called 3D industries (dirty, dangerous, difficult) in five categories: "prominent public constructions, prominent production industries, domestic helpers, caretakers, foreign crews in response to labor shortage" (Ma, 2011, p. 354). The number was 579,000 in mid-2015 and is predicted to reach 600,000 by the end of 2016 (Ministry of the Interior, 2015). More than 40% of the migrant workers come from Indonesia, 28% from Vietnam, 20% from the Philippines, and 13% from Thailand (Ministry of the Interior, 2015). More than half are female migrants, and almost all the women are engaged in caretaking at home or in nursing facilities. Most men are in the construction and fishing industries. These workers are recruited under the logic of "temporary" and "selective" so that they do not have a long-term or independent impact on Taiwan's labor conditions (Ma, 2011). Intergovernmental relations and migration policies are often two sides of one coin in Taiwan. For example, on May 9, 2013, the Philippine coast guard fired at the *Guang Da Xin No. 28*, a Taiwanese commercial fishing boat, and caused a death. This incident brought a temporary halt to Filipino immigrants' entrance to Taiwan. Hostility and tension toward Filipino nationals consequently increased during that period.

Research on international migration has provided contours of the conditions migrant workers face in Asian regions within and across borders and has aimed to address these structural inequalities and their impact on migrants' lives. However, as Asis, Piper, and Raghuram (2009) pointed out, most research has focused on policy making and influence over policy limitations. They suggested that more research is needed on cultural representations of migrants in both sending and receiving societies. The present research focuses on a non-Western context and responds to their call by tracing the representations of migrant workers' "social status," to use Fraser's (2002) term, in Taiwan. Two research questions were developed: (1) How are migrants framed and (mis)represented to Taiwanese society in mainstream newspapers? (2) What social locations are created for them in these representations?

Method

Fraser (2000) proposed a status model that examines how "institutionalized patterns of cultural value" affect "relative standing of social actors" (p. 113). This model advocates consideration of both representation and recognition culturally, politically, and economically in social interactions to avoid "institutionalized relations of social subordination" (p. 114) whereby certain people are denied the full status of peer partners in interactions. Misrecognition of groups as comparatively unworthy of respect perpetuates the "parity-impeding cultural norms," which "constitute some categories of social actors as normative and others as deficient or inferior" (p. 114). Similarly, Young (2011) argued to end dominance sustained through "the symbolic meanings that people attach to other kinds of people and to actions, gestures, or institutions" (p. 23). Fraser's use of "complete social actors" and Young's focus on power relations among groups led to examination of the process of attaching a population to various policies and

symbolic realities through dominant public discourse such as news, and showed that such a process consequently creates positions in the society for them.

Discourses are symbolic in nature, with real power to (re)produce social domination among groups (van Dijk, 2009). News articles offer a rich site to discern "the socially shared opinions of a group" (van Dijk, 2009, p. 79) informed and furthered by particular ideologies (Bové, as cited in Ono & Sloop, 2002). Discourse analysis that "triangulates between society/culture/situation, cognition, and discourse/language" reveals the process of social inclusions and exclusions that sustain dominance (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 14). Proposing a "dialectical-relational approach," Fairclough (2012) noted that interrelated elements such as social relations, power, institutions, and cultural values are part of discursive construction of a particular worldview legitimized by relations of power and domination. Combined with Fraser's theoretical lens of misrecognizing and misrepresenting social actors and Young's dimensions of dominance, a critical-discourse analysis of mainstream news sheds light on the ways migrants in Taiwan are positioned.

In 2013, a survey by Shih Hsin University found that more than 70% of Taiwan's population obtains news from the Internet as the second most used news source behind television. Currently, four media conglomerates disseminate information in Taiwan. Next Media Ltd., Lien Bon Corporate Group, and Want Want China Times Group were established in the early 2000s. The United News Group was established in 1955. Hsu (2006) explained that during the mid-1990s, these conglomerates integrated all their divisions from both print and electronic platforms to present information in their online versions. The owner of *China Times* claimed that its readership and circulation remained the same even though the content of the print and online versions are essentially the same ("Print Newspapers," 1999). In addition, traditional news channels such as China Television, Chinese Television System, and Formosa TV provide online platforms for more interaction and allow their audiences to read news on the screen. Beginning in November 2011, I used Google's search alert to gather news reports on *wai ji lao gon* (foreign workers) in Taiwan. Until April 2014, I collected 506 news articles, primarily from *Apple Daily News* by the Hong Kong–based Next Media Ltd., *Liberty Times* by Lien Bon Corporate Group, *China Times* and *Commercial Times* by Want Want China Times Group, and *Economic Daily* and *United Daily News* by the United News Group.[2] About 6% of the articles came from ETtoday News Net, NOW News, Yam News, and the Great News Daily. These online-only news producers, the four major news corporations, and online news from television systems are the primary news sources in Taiwanese society (Tu, 2006).

Greenberg and Miazhevich (2012) proposed to examine both inferred and overt statements, "critical omissions, and shifting emphases and tones" for ideologies "underlying justification of media statements" (p. 81). In this research, I engaged in multiple readings and examined phrases used to describe these workers, attributive words attached to them, omitted information, roles or people related to them, and events in which they appear in the stories.

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[2] These news articles are in Mandarin. I translated the excerpts included in this article.

Findings

Objectification of Foreign Laborers

Migrants in Taiwan are often reported on from a numerical perspective that treats this group as a faceless collective existing for the "market need." In the news reports, these newcomers are overwhelmingly referred to as *wailao*, which appears 15 times more frequently than *wai* (outside) *ji* (national) *lao* (labor) *gon* (workers). *Wailao* is short for *waijilaogon*. *Wai* means "foreign," and *lao* can mean either "labor" or "laborers." Almost all news reports employ the term *wailao* (2,570) instead of *waijilaogon* (180) when referring to both a foreign labor force and foreign labor workers. In this section, I translated *wailao* as "foreign labor~~ers~~" with "er" crossed out to emphasize that no distinction is made between their roles as laborers and their provision of labor. Their personhood and their work are conflated and finally become synonymous. They are simply labor.

Yam News reported: "Fights broke out among foreign labor groups like wars between countries. . . . On Sundays or holidays, it is not difficult to spot a large group of foreign labor~~ers~~ congregating . . . *in every nook and cranny*" (emphasis added, October 21, 2013, para. 2). *China Times* reported, "Foreign labor~~ers~~ increase violently and the number will break 500,000 next year" (December 16, 2013, para. 1). On December 20, 2013, *United Daily News* published an article with a headline "The army of foreign labor will explode alarmingly to 500,000 next year." Finally, *Liberty Times* reported, "The number of foreign labor~~ers~~ . . . is completely out of control. . . . It has continuously increased along the way and become an addiction that cannot be removed in Taiwan's labor market" (February 24, 2014, para. 2).

A sense of growing mayhem accompanies the news media's portrayal of migrant workers being ubiquitous in Taiwan. The workers' sheer numbers seem to indicate greater societal problems in these reports. Words and phrases such as *violent*, *army*, *war*, and *explode alarmingly* are used to describe migrant workers in articles that omit any mention of the workers' contributions to society by taking on physically demanding yet poorly compensated jobs. Instead, social issues became the portrayed outcome. Moreover, by using sensational phrases such as *every nook and cranny* in a nonchalant manner, a sense of invasion and being taken over is created. The xenophobia expressed here echoes the antagonistic sentiment toward the Filipina workers in Hong Kong found in Constable's (1997) research. In Taiwanese and Chinese societies, skin tone is a class identifier because it indicates one's occupation as more outdoor and labor-intensive or indoor and mental-intensive. In these densely populated locales, boundaries between "them"—the foreign laborers—and "us"—the natives—are racially classed. It is the faceless and overflowing army of blue-collar, darker-skinned foreign laborers—not the European, American, Korean, or Japanese white-collar, lighter-skinned foreigners who often work for multinational corporations—who are to be guarded with fear and vigilance due to their visible anonymity and claimed rapid increase in numbers.

Further, migrant workers are allegorized as drugs to which Taiwan is addicted for the "illness" of labor shortage. Taiwan is likened to a weak patient relying on such imperative substances. The relationship described is one with unbalanced power, whereby foreign laborers take control of the addicted Taiwanese body and the addiction continues to worsen. There is less reporting on how migrant workers

receive roughly a 15% lower wage than that stated in the Labor Standards Act. In addition to paying their brokers monthly fees, many work overtime with no holidays (Lan, 2006; *Liberty Times*, February 10, 2014). The fact that the basic wage in the current Labor Standards Act is similar to the family income in 1987 (Liu, 2009) adds another level of hardship for migrant workers. Starting September 1, 2015, the monthly wage for foreign domestic workers increased from NT$15,840 to NT$17,000, but the increase in the national minimum wage was greater: from NT$19,273 to NT$20,008 (Ministry of Labor, 2015). Such an unequal exchange in value is exploitation in which "the amount of labor embodied in any bundle of goods he [*sic*] could receive . . . is less than the labor he expended" (Roemer, as cited in Young, 2011, p. 52). Likening Taiwanese society to drug victims controlled by migrant workers distorts the oppressive social, political, economic, and cultural positions in which these laborers are located. Once again, Taiwan is portrayed as a victim being invaded and controlled by migrant workers who, by law, receive less pay than do Taiwanese nationals.

Even with the reported large number of migrant workers, reports on an ever-needy market for the labor force in Taiwan continued. In a series of news reports, migrants were rhetorically framed and politically treated as commodities to be negotiated and exchanged in globalized import–export interactions under the laws of demand and supply. *United Daily News* reported that Myanmar "is the target for its plentiful labor force" and the government was "aggressively exploring fresh troops" (August 26, 2013, para. 1). In another article, foreign laborers were described as "supplies," and populations in Sri Lanka and Outer Mongolia should be "developed" immediately (February 13, 2014, para. 1). In these reports, Taiwanese are bestowed the power to explore and expand potential markets of labor force and monitor its explosive growth to curtail hidden societal "indirect costs . . . of social problems" (*China Times*, April 1, 2014). Foreign migrant workers serve as an instrument for needs and cost-benefit calculations while having few options. These human beings are discussed as resourceful "fresh troops" to be probed, possessed, evaluated, and traded as profitable products, with no mention of this objectifying process in which their bodies and labor become underappreciated goods in the "coercive structure that gave workers few options" (Young, 2011, p. 53).

In the 1960s and 1970s, Taiwan achieved its economic "miracle" with cheap labor, low taxes, and plentiful energy (Davison, 2003). However, with globalized markets, its labor-intensive industries have been losing their competitive advantage since the mid-1980s. With women gaining more education and higher wages, family structures have changed in the society. Dual-income nuclear families have become a norm due to the rising living costs in many cities (Lan, 2006). Under the neoliberal "no alternative" market-based ethos (Harvey, 2005), migrant workers in Taiwan are utilized as "narcotic drugs" and "antidotes" in a double-bind impossible position. They are to be "imported" into the needy Taiwanese market under governmental agreements. Loveband (2004) described how labor brokers train migrant workers as "positioning products" before their employment to serve particular "markets." At the receiving end, these news reports employ rhetorical practices to train the market to view the workers as products. With their training, the workers are to quickly "adjust to the work environment" (*Apple Daily News*, February 19, 2014, para. 5) but are kept away from the social milieu. Instead, their bodies and spirits are "managed" and "contained" while their labor is extracted and turned into capitalized "antidotes" in their residing society. Against the backdrop of xenophobic anxiety, they are kept in an oxymoronic position of being desperately needed and excessively invasive.

Differentiated and Gendered Marginalization

The language of criminality and legality permeates most news on foreign migrant workers. Workers who leave their employment, often due to hardship, without informing the employer are referred to as "escaped" or "runaway" foreign laborers. Late in 2013, a series of reports on the large number of escaped migrant workers in Taiwan emerged as a primary agenda epitomized by a Democratic Progressive Party legislator's assertions of having "ghost towns of foreign laborers" (ETtoday News Net, November 4, 2013, para. 2). The words *escaped* and *runaway*, which carry an undertone of illegality, were used to refer to foreign laborers more than 380 times in 506 news articles. The reasons for the workers' escapes from their sponsoring employers usually were omitted. When mentioned, primary reasons included "wanting more money for an easy life" (*Liberty Times*, December 19, 2013, para. 2), "didn't want to work" (*Formosa TV News*, April 27, 2013, para. 3), or "inability to manage hard working conditions" (*United Daily News*, November 15, 2013, para. 3). These explanations indicated foreign laborers' supposed lack of willingness to work hard as a cultural virtue upheld in Taiwan instead of considering the flawed labor and migrant policies and practices (Loveband, 2004). Phrases such as *illegal foreign laborers* appeared at an exorbitant rate, which connects migrant workers to the legal system. On March 18, 2014, United News Network explained that the Police Bureau would launch a "more aggressive search in locations frequented by foreign laborers" due to "an increasing trend of crime committed by [them]" (para. 3). This type of careless association sets an agenda for a natural correlation between foreign laborers and illegality, even though in reality, the crime rate within this group is lower than that among Taiwanese citizens. According to data provided by the National Police Administration of the Interior Department (2014), the crime rate in 2014 among Taiwanese citizens was five times higher than that among migrant workers. The rhetorical framing of "ordered us" versus "unlawful them" between natives and migrants, as found in the analyses by Ono and Sloop (2002) and van Dijk (1998), is present in these news reports.

When migrant workers' benevolent deeds were occasionally reported, the representation of Taiwanese society being munificent appeared concomitantly. On March 20, 2013, *China Times* reported "an escaped Malaysian male *wailao* Huang Wei Ming," who, after being caught, was found to have been donating approximately "US$8,000 to charities within the past four years. . . . As a recovered alcoholic, he wanted to show gratitude for the help he received from the Taiwanese people during his 25-year stay" (para. 3). It is rare for the migrant worker's full name to appear in the news, as it does in this report. The news regularly employs "a male or female escaped *wailao*" as the first label and then identifies his or her nationality, sometimes with either the first or last name or a nickname. Migrant workers are rarely quoted in the news other than being paraphrased, whereas their Southeast Asian origins are kept in the forefront of the reporting. The insinuated and repeated connection of the geographic location and cultural meanings conjures up a kind of Manichean allegory, which serves as a hierarchical binary rationale in relating to the world. In these news representations, people of Southeast Asian nations are relegated to an inferior position, and their voices are summarized for them.

Reports on international migrant workers are also highly gendered. The main topics in the news articles about female foreign laborers included sex trafficking victims and their physical appearance. The most common storyline was about immigration agents successfully rescuing escaped female foreign laborers who fell prey to criminals and became prostitutes. These reports often sensationalized these

women's sexuality by focusing on details of their sexual exploitation. When they were not victims, news reports emphasized their femininity. On June 7 2013, a series of reports on an escaped Vietnamese migrant worker who was arrested on her way to a birthday party focused on her "beauty and soft-spoken sweet manner" (para. 8). The release of her picture in the news articles attracted phone calls of marriage proposals to the police station where she was detained and generated more news on her femininity. In August 2013, a similar report described an Indonesian college graduate migrant worker named Jessica who was arrested by an immigration officer. *Apple Daily News* referred to her on August 29, 2013, as a "hot chick" and described her as "Jessica, height 166 cm, weight 50 kilograms, with big watery eyes" (para. 1). Finally, migrant women's sexuality is highlighted in the news about their unselective and careless sexual activities. A March 19, 2014, article on "stateless children" born in Taiwan of undocumented workers stated, "It is not uncommon to see [female] foreign laborers giving birth outside of marriage" (*United Daily News*, para. 1).

The focus on female migrant workers' sexuality and reproductive capability in these news representations reveals the ways these women's bodies become the domain of Taiwanese societal imagination and property to manage. Fully agreeing to the atrocity of human trafficking, the inclusion of detailed information on the working conditions of these sex workers rather than their humanity and resilience as individuals portrays their victimhood as sexual objects to be consumed once again by their host society through reading the news. Such an overwhelming focus on and anxiety about controlling migrant women's sexuality is well documented (Constable, 1997). Lan (2008) wrote about how migrant women's bodies are sites of control in an unequal relationship between the Taiwanese government and the laborers. Similarly, reports on women migrants' appearance and premarital reproductive activities positioned them in a location of sexual fantasy and desire to be consumed. Their decisions to bear offspring are condemned due to their social position.

Male migrant workers are also highly sexualized in news representations. However, they are often depicted as perpetrators instead of victims. *Formosa TV News* included a report on April 27, 2013, about how "Escaped foreign laborers create many societal problems. . . . The police caught an escaped foreign laborer who hid at the riverbank to rob women who were exercising" (para. 1). Taiwanese females are often reported as victims who are preyed upon by male migrant workers and rescued by Taiwanese men. For example, an article in *China Times* reported that "a Vietnamese foreign laborer" denied a charge of harassing "a college woman" on a bus. It took a male soldier who testified to bring the Vietnamese man to justice (October 29, 2013, para. 1). The representation of male foreign laborers as sexually aggressive invokes a similar portrayal of African American men in the United States (Orbe, 1998). These stories heighten a sense of "group-related feelings of nervousness or aversion" (Young, 2011, p. 148) that turn male migrants' bodies fearsome. The absence of gender identification for the foreign laborers and the national identification of local female victims allude to a ubiquitous threat of "this could happen to me" for anyone who assumes the position of subject against the male migrant workers. In this classic narrative in which "our" women are to be protected from "them," foreign male laborers are portrayed as a constant threat to local Taiwanese women.

Young (2011) called marginalization "the most dangerous form of oppression . . . [in that] a whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life" (p. 53). Such exclusion makes

material and symbolic subjugation easier. The reports tell a story of how Taiwanese men enforce laws to save migrant women and protect Taiwanese women against migrant men.

Multilevel Triangulations Over Migrant Bodies

The third social position in which migrant workers were represented in the news was that of being under constant surveillance at multiple levels. Under close watch are their bodies, their movements, their appearance, and their presence. Accompanying framing migrant workers as a potential danger to Taiwanese society are reports on surveillance techniques supported by multiple parties. Xenophobia is therefore practiced with consensus.

Newcomers from non-Western nations to the United States and Australia have historically been (and still are) stigmatized as potential disease carriers (Berns, 1998; Shah, 2001). Such a perception also seems to exist in Taiwanese news representations, where foreign laborers are reported to be examined "every 6, 18, and 30 months into the employment" (*NOW News*, January 9, 2014, para. 3). Submission of proof of the complete treatment for any failed exam result is imperative for a valid working permit. Most foreigners who work in Taiwan must receive health examinations. In addition to the required examinations, blue-collar migrant workers are subject to stool examinations for parasites, skin examinations, and pregnancy tests for women.[2]

As Castel (1991) argued, these "preventive prophylaxis" practices have shifted actual *danger* to *risks* and allow "the public authorities [to] undertake a special surveillance of those population groups . . . located at the bottom of the social ladder [for] medical hygiene" (pp. 284–285). The news reports frame the health exam as if it were solely for the blue-collar *waijilaogon* (foreign laborers) but neglect to mention that white-collar migrant workers also need to be examined. Their exam form is entitled "Foreign national *bu-xi-ban* (English after-school programs) teacher health exam form," which is different from the "Foreign laborer health exam form" (Centers for Disease Control, R.O.C. [Taiwan], 2014). This omission suggests that only foreign workers such as laborers from Southeast Asia and not foreign workers such as teachers from English-speaking Western nations could potentially pollute Taiwanese society. Further, the media missed an opportunity to inform the public about the discriminatory treatment of various migrant workers based on their nationalities. National identities instead of actual problems are factual enough to perform these preventive and risk-reducing measures on the least powerful groups in society. For example, female migrant laborers, but not those who migrate as professional workers, receive pregnancy tests to "suppress future risks" (Castel, 1991, p. 285) that may produce undesirable members of society. On April 14, 2013, the state-owned Central News Agency reported these health examinations held by Taipei's Department of Labor as an example of "spreading love around the world—free health care for

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[2] According to the 2014 Centers for Disease Control, R.O.C. [Taiwan] website, the health examination that is required for most foreign workers in Taiwan encompasses both physical examinations (including height, weight, blood pressure, pulse, body temperature, vision, head and neck, thorax, heart auscultation, abdomen, locomotion, and mental status) as well as laboratory testing (including a serological test for HIV and syphilis, a chest X-ray for tuberculosis, and proof of positive measles and rubella antibody titers).

foreign national laborers." Such framing disguises the promotion of what Castel (1991) called a "new mode of surveillance: that of systematic predetection" (p. 288), in which benevolent and therapeutic disciplinary policies that dispense with reciprocal relationships are launched on certain populations.

The level of surveillance exercised is beyond health regulations. Migrant workers' precarious positions are revealed in news articles in which their everyday movements and presences are scrutinized by the civilian watch, law enforcement, and national and intergovernmental regulations. Several news articles reported that law enforcement captured undocumented workers because of their "abnormal" behaviors, ranging from "walking with luggage while glancing around" (March 27, 2013, United News Network, para. 1), "unfamiliar [faces] looking around" (NOW News, February 24, 2014, para. 1), and "gathering to have a meal in the morning [instead of during typical lunch hours and] carrying too many personal belongings" (*China Times*, February 24, 2014, para. 1). *China Times*, on April 5, 2014, reported that an elderly farmer helped the police to catch a foreign laborer who hid in a tree because he "saw that the tree was swinging when there was no wind" (para. 1).

These news articles portray an efficient and collaborative society where law enforcement and civilians work hand in hand. They communicate an image that migrant workers are effectively managed in Taiwan by constant surveillance in their daily activities, including carrying "too many" personal items or having a meal at an irregular lunch hour. Further, in 2014, the Vietnamese government started to place a fine of approximately US$3,300 on overseas Vietnamese workers who escaped from their employment and visa sponsors (*Apple Daily News*, December 19, 2013, para. 1). The national and intergovernmental surveillance these migrant workers face is reported in a commonsense fashion, overshadowing the migrants' contributions to both their nations of birth and residence. Without providing comprehensive information to construct these workers' realities and to reveal the benefits Taiwanese society receives from their labor,[3] the news articles narrate from the dominant perspective and are complicit in normalizing and perpetuating the social and legal context that makes these intrusive acts possible.

Imperialistic Cultural Attitudes Toward Migrant Workers

The final representation derived from the news articles is the depiction of migrant workers as those whose cultural beliefs and practices are less desirable. Incidents reported in the news depict these workers as less civil or less emotionally stable in how they conduct their lives.

A series of reports pertaining to migrant workers' violations of the law without providing sufficient background information subsequently portrayed a binary of "civilized us" versus "uncivilized them." Several articles targeted Southeast Asian migrant workers for their treatment of dogs and cats. On July 7, 2013, *Apple Daily News* reported, "Animal Rescue Team Taiwan (ARTT) received complaints. . . . A seasoned volunteer [without direct evidence] suspected that the traps were set up by foreign laborers working in a nearby factory." On December 29, 2013, *China Times* reported:

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[3] For example, according to Liu Mei-chun (2009), foreign laborers contribute, on average, an additional 46 hours of free labor weekly, whereas the legal number of working hours is 48.

Much commotion has occurred with pictures posted on Facebook showing Southeast Asian foreign laborers killing and removing the fur of dogs and cats. The Labor Department of New Taipei County stated that even though consuming cats and dogs in winter is legal in some of the foreign laborers' home countries, it is forbidden in Taiwan. (para. 1)

In these reports, articulating phrases such as *Southeast Asian*, *foreign laborers*, and *dog killers* with little context and based on speculation generated dangerous stereotypes. This issue is framed as a national and cultural issue in that migrant workers from this particular region are accustomed to such illegal and foreign behavior. This conflation of the region with eating dogs and cats promotes a static image of Southeast Asians as uncivilized and cruel people.

As Podberscek (2009) pointed out, dog meat was consumed in South Korea and in parts of eastern Switzerland until 1996. Further, these reports missed an opportunity to inform the public about how the practices have been addressed in particular local environments. For example, cat eating was banned in Vietnam in 1998, and dog eating was outlawed in the Philippines in 1998. Framing dog and cat consumption as less civilized missed an opportunity for a critical discussion and perpetuated an unchallenged Euro-American–based cultural imperialism expressed through preferred lifestyles such as food choices. In other words, the cultural history of how Taiwan has completed its assimilation to the Western grand narrative on "advanced modernity" is left unquestioned.

The migrant workers in Taiwan are constructed as the cultural "Other" who violates the assumed local culture in other ways. The following reports reveal the underlying assumptions of migrant workers as inconsiderate when it comes to public civility. On September 8, 2013, *Apple Daily News* reported that a passenger videotaped a group of 10 "extremely rowdy" foreign laborers on a train in which one "even did gymnastics with the handles on the train and disregarded the presence of other passengers" (para. 1). A news article titled "30,000 Foreign Laborers Occupied Taipei Train Station. A Prosecutor Facebooked: Trouble Will Ensue" reported:

The photos sent from the public show Muslims wearing headscarves congregated and crowded in Taipei train station. Most of them are foreign laborers. This was the first Sunday after Ramadan, and vast numbers of foreign laborers gathered at the train station to celebrate. . . . The crowd sat around . . . making the station hall very noisy and disordered. *People* who needed to buy tickets could only find limited space to pass through or detour. . . . A prosecutor called for governmental management for this unsightly scene. (*Apple Daily News*, August 12, 2013, emphasis added)

The descriptions of the headscarf-wearing Muslims and loud foreign laborers violating and disregarding "our" ways of living reveal the cultural conflicts in which appropriate public behaviors are assumed and expected. These articles describing how "people" like us had to endure the uncivil behaviors position the migrant workers as less cultured and as outside of the generic term *people*. The "public" recorded and disseminated these instances on social media, which drew further debates and news reports on "their" behaviors. Similar to what Constable (1997) found in her research on migrant workers in Hong

Kong, public space became private for the natives when it came to migrant workers. Further, pointing to headscarves as the signifier and Ramadan as the context, describes the Muslim identity more visually than culturally. The absence of explanations for meanings and practices of Ramadan, which is significant to the Muslim communities, reduces their identity to a quick-to-identify appearance distinct from "us."

Migrant workers represented in the news often act in an irrational, easily provoked, and emotionally unstable manner. *Apple Daily News* reported a relationship-related stabbing incident where an Indonesian domestic worker knifed her former boyfriend in his thigh at the train station. The reporter concluded, "Witnesses exclaimed, 'It is too scary! Killing at the train station!'" (October 13, 2013, para. 2). The word *alcohol* appears more than 100 times in these reports and is often connected to descriptions of "fights," "stabbing," "anger," and "killing." The typical storyline describes a friendly gathering where alcohol was consumed, which was followed by harmful destruction. *China Times* had a December 30, 2014, story stated:

> A fire took place in a foreign labor dormitory. Concerned neighbors shared that there are more than 10 Thai laborers residing there without much management. In addition to their late-night drinking and loud conversations, they often host barbeque parties indoors. The neighbors viewed these laborers as a ticking bomb and believe that the fire was caused by either their barbequing or their lack of common sense with electricity usage. (para. 4)

Migrant workers in these reports are depicted as untrustworthy, uneducated, and incapable of maintaining a safe environment. These descriptions imply their volatile nature and lack of sense that might endanger themselves, their friends, and the neighborhood. The emphasis on the migrants' national identity conflates their diverse ethnic, class, and regional differences, especially when many Southeast Asian migrant workers are highly educated (Lan, 2011). They are described as the "incomprehensible Other" (Said, 1978), whose difference is to be approached as general and complete. As Bolt (2011) pointed out, the Chinese have historically held the dominant role in Southeast Asia, and such an outlook continues in Taiwanese policies in the region (Chen, 2010). Such cultural imperialism is revealed in these news reports, which in turn allows this power relation to persist. Unlike U.S. media representation of immigrants as "prone to rioting, crime, and other suspect behavior" (Flores, 2003, p. 368) and posing a danger to the national resources and ways of being (Inda, 2000), migrant workers in Taiwan are constructed as threats out of ignorance of common knowledge and are seen as driven by a lack of self-discipline, which is one of the most significant Confucian traits for ideal personhood. Stories about migrants' social lives subtly imply that their cultural flaws led to tragic events in seemingly harmless gatherings.

Conclusion

Of the 506 news articles analyzed, only 5 portray migrant workers as contributing agents by showing how they offer assistance to Taiwanese society. The overall representation of migrant workers is the trope of the threat of Southeast Asian laborers, which creates a necessity for more forceful regulations and control. Migrant workers as a social group are positioned in an oppressive relational space,

marginalized and excluded from expressing their confined freedom. Within the trope that migrant workers are a threat, contradictions exist. Migrant workers are framed as antidote-like drugs that Taiwanese society is addicted to and relies on, yet they are simultaneously treated as diseases to be kept at a distance. Their existence is portrayed as both conspicuous and a latent danger. They are viewed as an out-of-control threat, yet are always defeated. Words such as *regulations* and *legality* are attached to migrant workers, whereas *social harmony* and *order* are associated with the government, such as health examiners or police officers. Although sporadic exceptions did appear in the newspapers, with some readers questioning where migrant workers could celebrate holidays and acknowledging that dog-eating practices also happen in Taiwan, they seldom make it into the news section, instead appearing as opinions. Because knowledge of the cultural representation of immigrants has been well researched, particularly in the West, focusing on the ways transnational migrants are represented through discursive construction bridges gaps in the current literature in which policies have been the central concern. Mainstream news acts as a part of the "apparatus" (Foucault, 1980) that re/produces "truth" about the migrants and simultaneously generates more discussions pertaining to this population in Taiwan.

Through the use of omissions, inferences, and emphases on particular events in news reports, the migrant workers are placed in an impossible position to exist politically, economically, and culturally in Taiwanese society as equal participants. Similar to Young's (2011) description of being "imprisoned in their bodies" (p. 123), Taiwanese news practitioners report on these non-Western migrant workers using the rhetoric of distancing and negation, underpinned by imperialistic worldviews. As Chen (2010) cogently argued, Taiwan has adopted a "subimperialistic tendency" (p. 18), which captures former empires' economic, cultural, and political ideologies. It concurrently exists without full engagement in its decolonization process to develop "a more adequate understanding of the formerly colonized world in the new context of neoliberal globalization" (Chen, 2010, p. xiii). As the more strongly globally positioned countries with more capital flow influence those in weaker positions in terms of policy, culture, and population movements, the ways that the Taiwanese dominant discourse represents these migrants unfortunately resemble how immigrants have been viewed in Western societies. Influenced by the myth of market-driven inevitability and cultural imperialism, they are reported on as primitive outsiders to be utilized and kept under control for the purity and continuation of "modernity" (Chang & Aoki, 1997; Chavez, 2001).

Constructing migration is past and contemporary history in the making. This research furthers our understanding of cultural representations of migration in mainstream news outlets, particularly in Taiwan. As mentioned, some readers occasionally challenged these news reports. Future research on audience comments would provide interpretations of these representations. In addition, some positive stories showing foreign workers' resilience to overcome struggles appeared in alternative news outlets such as *Lihpao Daily* and *Sifongpao*, both operated by Shih Hsin University. Established in 1988, *Lihpao Daily* is a left-leaning newspaper that holds progressive stands toward issues such as LGBTQ rights and environmentalism. Since 2006, *Sifongpao* has provided monthly material about im/migrants in Taiwan and is currently published in Vietnamese, Thai, Indonesian, Khmer, and Burmese languages. In 2000, Buddhist Master Hsing Yun started *Merit Times* to advocate social justice and equality for the marginalized groups. Future analyses to include these alternative news venues will expand the understanding of discursive constructions of transnational migrant workers' subjectivity in Taiwan. As more cross-border interactions

driven by various economic, technological, sociopolitical, and cultural forces occur, more research that compares and contrasts representations of various types of migrants in other Asian regions such as Hong Kong, South Korea, and Singapore will provide a broader understanding. Given the complex colonial histories and the impact of globalization, such research will undoubtedly provide rich perspectives rooted in third-world experiences.

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