



The **Opportunity** Agenda

*Building the National Will
to Expand Opportunity in America*

Media Content Analysis:

*Immigration Coverage
in Chinese-Language
Newspapers*

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About The Opportunity Agenda

The Opportunity Agenda was founded in 2004 with the mission of building the national will to expand opportunity in America. Focused on moving hearts, minds and policy over time, the organization works closely with social justice organizations, leaders, and movements to advocate for solutions that expand opportunity for everyone. Through active partnerships, The Opportunity Agenda uses communications and media to understand and influence public opinion; synthesizes and translates research on barriers to opportunity and promising solutions; and identifies and advocates for policies that improve people's lives. To learn more about The Opportunity Agenda, go to our website at www.opportunityagenda.org.

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Foreword

In the summer and fall of 2008, The Opportunity Agenda commissioned three reports, to look more closely at the current attitudes and perceptions of immigration in the United States. Following its collection of research from 2006 and 2007, which examined the overall dominant message frames around immigration with specific focus on Web 2.0, African American and Spanish speaking press, we determined it would be beneficial to expand the body of literature by examining more closely two specific issues and two specific media of communication that help shape public discourse and opinion around immigration in our country. The findings and recommendations of our research are presented here in this three-part series.

In the first report of this series, two issues deeply tied to the immigrant experience are examined, public opinion and media coverage of English language acquisition and the children of immigrants. Previous research has shown that the public is greatly interested in immigrants' ability and willingness to learn English, and also that some openings to promote pro-immigrant policy exist around children. Thus, understanding public perception of these issues is critical to developing strategies to build support for immigration policies.

The second report in this series focuses on Chinese print media in the United States. While continuing to expand the base of immigration support is important, also crucial is further connecting the existing bases. Therefore, examining media coverage of immigrants within their own native speaking and ethnic press offers insight into how these outlets can play a role in promoting immigration reform and integration policies.

Finally, The Opportunity Agenda commissioned a media analysis of broadcast news and talk radio, a gap in our previous scans which focused only on print media. Anecdotal evidence suggested that broadcast coverage played a substantial role in influencing the immigration debate. In this report, both national and local television news outlets were examined, as well as leading television and radio news commentary programs. We were interested in broad trends and how they related to our earlier findings in print as well as to our ethnic media scans.

The Opportunity Agenda is committed to working with leading voices in the pro-immigration movement, understanding that the immigrant experience is an important part of the American story—often an icon of the principles and values that encompass the promise of America. In working to build a national will for opportunity and equality that includes all persons living within our borders, The Opportunity Agenda has developed, with help from its many partners, a core narrative that unifies and strengthens the movement, calling for real solutions that uphold our nation's values and move us all forward together as one group. In presenting these three reports, we hope that voices in the field not just better understand the messages that frame the immigrant experience, but move closer toward a unified vision that expands the scope of opportunity to all.

1. Major Findings

- ▶ The Chinese press closely followed changes in immigration policy and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) monthly visa bulletins.
- ▶ Immigration coverage in Chinese newspapers differed based on the location of the newspaper to reflect local news. For example, Chinese newspapers in New York featured more coverage of immigration raids because there were more raids in New York within that period of time. Immigration coverage also changed throughout the year to reflect seasonal events. For example, all major newspapers focused on H-1B visa issues in April when the visa quota was released, and May was devoted to immigration stories related to Asian Heritage Month.
- ▶ Chinese newspapers did not single out undocumented immigrants in their coverage of immigration. Rather they reported on issues such as health care, education, and the economy that affect all immigrants. Chinese newspapers do not seem to have a unified policy on diction: they used the terms *undocumented* and *illegal* interchangeably.
- ▶ Chinese newspapers published numerous articles to help new immigrants integrate into American society and culture. At the same time, they helped them keep ties to their home country.
- ▶ The Chinese press failed to draw a larger connection between the experience of Chinese immigrants and those from other ethnic communities.

2. Research Methodology

This report monitors immigration-related stories published in four major Chinese daily newspapers—the *China Press*, *Ming Pao Daily*, *Sing Tao Daily*, and *World Journal*—from April to June 2008.

Demography of Chinese Newspapers

The *China Press*, *Ming Pao Daily*, *Sing Tao Daily*, and *World Journal* are four major daily newspapers published in the United States. The *China Press* was originally sponsored by the Chinese government; the *Ming Pao Daily* and *Sing Tao Daily* are based in Hong Kong; and the *World Journal* is originally from Taiwan. However, today the U.S. editions of all four newspapers are fairly independent, both editorially and operationally, from their home-country headquarters.

The four newspapers have multiple sections including international, U.S., China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Eastern Asian, and local news. Articles that focus on Chinese immigrants in the United States can be found in their national and local news sections. The newspapers' East and West Coast editions have distinct local news pages that focus on immigrants in these respective geographic areas.

In San Francisco, where there are more than 230,000 Chinese Americans, the *Sing Tao Daily* has the largest share of the Chinese newspaper market. In Los Angeles, where the Chinese population totals more than 407,000, the *World Journal* is the leading Chinese newspaper. In the greater New York area, where the population of Chinese immigrants is about 260,000, the average circulation of each of the four newspapers is about 40,000, with the *World Journal* and *Sing Tao Daily* slightly higher than the *Ming Pao Daily* and *China Press*.

Readership of the four publications has some overlaps. The *World Journal* is particularly popular among Taiwanese immigrants, and the *Sing Tao Daily* among Hong Kong and Cantonese-speaking immigrants. The newspapers compete for immigrants from mainland China, especially those from the coastal Fujian province, a major source of undocumented Chinese immigrants.

Monitoring from Two Coasts

Chinese newspapers publish East and West Coast editions and do not have online archives. Jun Wang monitored the immigration coverage of the four Chinese newspapers' Northwest Coast editions, including stories in the national and local sections. Rong Xiaoqing, a New America Media contractor on the East Coast, monitored immigration stories in the newspapers' greater New York editions.

3. Article Classification

This report analyzes 514 immigration-related stories published in the *China Press*, *Ming Pao Daily*, *Sing Tao Daily*, and *World Journal* from April 1 to June 30, 2008. These include press releases that are covered by all newspapers, as well as original reporting. The stories break down into hard news, features, investigative pieces, profiles, news analysis, and columns.

These stories follow two major tracks: immigrants in the United States, and immigrants' ties with their home countries (which include primarily mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong but also some Southeast Asian countries where there are large Chinese communities).

In the first track, stories look at various aspects of immigrant life in the United States. These can be divided into four categories:

- 1.** The first step/immigration-status issues: Stories document changes in immigration policy and look at detentions, deportations, raids, and immigrants' fights for their own rights.
- 2.** Challenges in a new country: Stories include various challenges immigrants face in the United States, such as the language barrier, economic inequality, workplace exploitation, and health issues.
- 3.** Integrating into the mainstream: Stories show immigrants' contributions to America, both economic and cultural.
- 4.** The cultural beat: Stories cover immigrants' efforts to remain connected to and to celebrate their heritage.

In the second track, stories display immigrants' connections with their home countries and how these connections help to strengthen (and, in some cases, hamper) relations between the home countries and the United States.

5. Ties to home countries.

This report finds that Chinese newspapers do a great job reporting immigration policy changes and informing their constituency how these changes might affect their lives. They also deserve kudos for educating new immigrants about the resources that are available to them and ways to fit into the new country.

However, the Chinese newspapers seem to be focusing solely on individual stories in the Chinese community and overlook the broader immigration landscape. By doing so, they lose the opportunity to show their readers where they fit in in the overall picture of immigration.

The 514 stories in the four newspapers can be broken down into the following categories:

(Note: Some one-time events that happened during this period of time may have affected the pattern of coverage. For example, the earthquake in China and the Olympics in Beijing significantly increased the number of stories in the “ties to home countries” category.)

1. The first step/immigration-status issues: 148 stories

Including:

Immigration policy and enforcement: 80

Immigration court cases (political asylum, marriage fraud, and others): 68

2. Challenges in a new country: 66 stories

Including:

Exploitation and resistance: 18

Education: 25

Health: 23

3. Integrating into the mainstream: 113 stories

Including:

Political involvement: 31

Outstanding immigrants (profiles of those who have been honored for their achievements in the United States): 66

Immigrants and the economy: 16

4. The cultural beat: 35 stories**5. Ties to home countries: 152 stories**

Including:

Earthquake relief: 117

Support for the Olympics: 32

Spies for the home country: 3

4. A Closer Look at the Coverage

Track One: Immigrants in the United States

Stories in Chinese newspapers touched on almost every aspect of immigrants' lives in the United States, from their challenges to their achievements. Stories can be divided into four major categories.

The first step/immigration-status issues

Stories in this category focused on how immigrants are able to stay in the United States. This is arguably the most important issue that all new immigrants face. It is also the basis of the mainstream debate on immigration reform.

Stories tracked the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) immigration policy changes and the agency's operations in processing applications for H-1B working visas, green cards, and citizenship. In April, the month DHS opened the lottery for the quotas of H-1B visas (which allow foreign students to work for a U.S. company after they graduate), all four newspapers followed the lottery process closely. It was such a hot topic because the visa caps not only affect foreign students but also many U.S. companies that rely on foreign workers.

Beyond explanatory journalism detailing these policies, some articles looked deeper into how immigrants navigate the system in order to stay in the United States in both legal and illegal ways. Court cases about applications for political asylum—which is most popular among Chinese immigrants from the Fujian Province—were thoroughly documented, as were crackdowns on undocumented immigrants.

Also included in the category are stories about detentions, deportations, and raids and how these affect the lives of immigrants as well as other Americans. Stories about the immigration debate and immigrants' fights for their own rights are also included in this category.

- ▶ H-1B–related stories dominated immigration coverage in April in all four Chinese-language newspapers.
- ▶ A story in the *Ming Pao Daily* on June 29 reported that 60% of applications for premium processing of the I-140 form, a crucial step toward getting a green card, were declined.

- ▶ A story in the *World Journal* on May 1 noted the USCIS promised to clear all green card application backlogs within two years.
- ▶ A story in the *Sing Tao Daily* on April 23, based on Access Washington, the monthly media briefing organized by New America Media, reported that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is aiming to deport all illegal immigrants by 2012.
- ▶ A story in the *Ming Pao Daily* on June 23 found that New York's Chinatown has been preparing for workplace raids that have been occurring more frequently across the country, so the local economy will not be as hard hit in the case of a raid.
- ▶ During May all four newspapers published various stories about the crackdowns on fraudulent marriages (in order to get green cards), and warned readers not to try to get green cards through fraudulent marriages to citizens.
- ▶ On May 30 all four newspapers covered a court case in which a Chinese man was arraigned for a fraudulent marriage.

Challenges in a new country

Getting in the door is only the first step. Immigrants find that a long and thorny road awaits them once they successfully manage to stay. Based on the reports in Chinese newspapers, the challenges for a new immigrant could be lurking anywhere from health care to education and the job market.

Chinese newspapers reported that the language barrier was the major challenge Chinese immigrants faced wherever they went, whether to a doctor's office or a parent-teacher meeting at a child's school. But newspapers reported that cultural differences also created confusion and misunderstandings, which made many parts of their lives more difficult, from job hunting to child education.

- ▶ A story in the *World Journal* on April 20 suggested ways for immigrant parents to help their Chinese-born children learn English in the United States by watching and discussing children's television shows, such as Sesame Street, and reading children's books in English.
- ▶ A story in the *China Press* on May 8 discussed whether physical punishment of children, a common part of traditional educational methods in China, is appropriate in the United States.
- ▶ A story in the *Sing Tao Daily* on May 6 found Asian students, particularly new immigrants who are English-language learners, are not benefiting from President Bush's No Child Left Behind policy.
- ▶ A story in the *Ming Pao Daily* on June 17 quoted a report released by the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families pointing out that 60% of immigrant families are not benefiting from the early-childhood education programs provided by New York City.

Chinese newspapers reported on immigrant health issues, from changes in diet that could have an effect on their physical health to feeling lost in a different health care system.

- ▶ An article in the *World Journal* on May 2 focused on the different requirements for getting vaccines in China and the United States. It is a common practice among struggling new immigrant parents to send their children back to China to be taken care of by relatives until school age. The article described the move by community leaders to push Chinese hospitals to give these children the vaccines required by the U.S. government, so they can meet the requirements for school enrollment when they return to the United States.

- ▶ An article in the *China Press* on June 25 called attention to the mental health of young immigrants. It told the story of a 17-year-old Chinese boy who immigrated to the United States when he was 10 and has mental health issues.
- ▶ On June 7 all four newspapers published stories about new legislation proposed by Chinese American New York State Assemblywoman Ellen Young. The legislation would require the state's injured workers' compensation to cover the cost of Chinese acupuncture.

But the toughest challenges for Chinese immigrants may come from the labor market. Chinese newspapers documented cases in which employers took advantage of undocumented Chinese workers, despite the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's attempts to protect all workers regardless of their immigration status.

Reports also document the potential problems and repercussions of the pending E-Verify system that the federal government is attempting to institute, which would require employers to check the Social Security numbers of their employees through the Social Security Administration's online database, and be held accountable if undocumented immigrants are hired.

- ▶ A story in the *World Journal* on May 22 described the latest labor rights case won by Chinese immigrants: 83 current and former employees of a Japanese restaurant in Manhattan won a total of \$593,222 in back pay owed by the employer. Most of the employees were Chinese immigrants. The Department of Labor, which investigated the case, found that the workers were paid less than minimum wage and were not paid for overtime.
- ▶ All four newspapers covered a major immigration rally on May 1, organized by various labor and human rights organizations, in which immigrant workers condemned the federal government's tightened penalties on employers who hire undocumented immigrants.
- ▶ A story in the *Ming Pao Daily* on May 27 reported that, as a result of the workplace raids by ICE across the country, many undocumented immigrant workers would rather take lower paying jobs in New York City, which they considered to be relatively "safe," than work for higher wages outside the city.

Integrating into the mainstream

Despite their challenges, immigrants try to contribute to society and fulfill their own American dream at the same time. Chinese newspapers documented the successes of immigrants' efforts to integrate into the American mainstream. These stories included profiles of outstanding immigrants and features about immigrants' contributions to U.S. economic, academic, and social development.

- ▶ A story in the *Sing Tao Daily* on April 19 profiled two Chinese immigrant owners of small businesses who received an award from the New York Association for New Americans.
- ▶ A story in the *Sing Tao Daily* on April 11 found, although the housing market was down nationwide and stagnant in New York, real-estate prices in the Chinese-dominated neighborhoods of New York were still going up.
- ▶ A story in the *Ming Pao Daily* on May 6 reported on outstanding Asian Americans recognized by the city of San Francisco.
- ▶ A story in the *World Journal* on June 10 profiled three new immigrant students in New York who overcame various challenges, from language barriers to culture shock, in a short time and were named model students when they graduated from high school.

Numerous articles focused on immigrants' involvement in politics, including community voter-registration efforts and immigrants' running for office, during this presidential election year.

- ▶ An article in the *Sing Tao Daily* on June 6 reported on the questionnaires sent to presidential candidates by the 80/20 Initiative, an organization aiming to increase the number of Asian voters, in order to determine which candidate the organization would endorse.
- ▶ A story in the *Ming Pao Daily* on June 19 reported that Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama joked about Asians' height when he was a guest on the Jimmy Kimmel Show, which prompted protests in the community.
- ▶ A story in the *World Journal* on June 5, when it was clear that Hillary Clinton would withdraw from the presidential race, reported that Chinese voters would strongly support an Obama-Clinton ticket. Without Clinton, the report noted, Obama might not be able to get as many votes from the Chinese community.
- ▶ All four newspapers also closely followed state and local candidates' campaigns, particularly those of Chinese candidates and candidates whose districts included Chinese-dominated neighborhoods, such as the Chinatowns in Oakland, San Francisco, and New York.

Some articles provided information to help immigrants better adjust to their lives in the United States.

- ▶ An article in the *Sing Tao Daily* on April 18 covered a forum in which panelists advised immigrants on how to cope with pressure, dress like an American, and educate the second generation, whose members are growing up in an environment with two cultures.
- ▶ A story in the *China Press* on June 17 interviewed legal experts about what immigrants need to know about the U.S. court system, including an immigrant's ability to testify as a witness in court without incurring questions about his or her own immigration status.
- ▶ An article in the *China Press* on June 19 advised immigrants to report crimes that happen to them or people around them.

The cultural beat

While they are learning to fit into a new culture, immigrants try their best to preserve their own culture as well. Cultural coverage in Chinese newspapers normally includes traditional festivals and ceremonies, such as the Chinese New Year, cultural parades, and relevant art exhibitions. During the studied time period Asian Heritage Month, which is May, became the main theme of this beat. Elected officials, from the New York mayor to the borough presidents, vied to host the celebration ceremony and offered awards to outstanding Asians. These were covered thoroughly by all four newspapers. The annual International Immigrants Cultural Week during the week of June 15 also received a fair amount of coverage.

Track Two: Ties to Home Countries

Immigrants connect to their home countries in various ways. Some of them still have family members living in their home country. But even for those who do not, the home country still keeps its special position in their hearts. During the studied period of time, on May 12 China suffered its most severe earthquake in three decades. Chinese immigrants in the United States immediately began a relief campaign. From entrepreneurs to delivery workers, regardless of their income or social status, immigrants donated to the relief fund.

The day after the earthquake the *China Press* devoted seven pages to the disaster. The *Sing Tao Daily* and the *World Journal* started a worldwide Sichuan Earthquake Relief Fund. They raised more than \$5 million in the first month from Chinese immigrants in the United States. All four newspapers documented these relief efforts.

At the same time, the Beijing Olympics drew a great deal of attention from Chinese immigrants. The events and campaigns held by immigrants in the lead-up to the Olympics also made headlines.

Beyond these one-time occasions, articles showed immigrants' connections to their home countries in various ways.

- ▶ An article in the *Sing Tao Daily* on June 1 told the story of a struggling Chinese American single mother who sent her 11-year-old son to a foster home in China, hoping that her son, who was known for his unruly manners, would learn discipline.
- ▶ A story in the *Ming Pao Daily* on June 2 reported that when the summer holiday began, the number of Chinese American children flying alone to China increased, and airlines were overwhelmed by requests for escorts.
- ▶ An article in the *Ming Pao Daily* on June 12 reported that a major Chinese community organization sent a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to protest her meeting with the Dalai Lama following the riots in Tibet.

5. Analysis

By closely following immigrants' lives in the United States and tracing their roots back to their home countries, Chinese newspapers seem to have done a good job painting a two-dimensional world for immigrants and guiding them in their transition from Chinese to Chinese American. Immigrants are able to get most of the information they need from Chinese newspapers, and observers can easily feel the pulse of the Chinese immigrant community by reading about their challenges, efforts, and achievements as portrayed by the Chinese press.

However, what seems to be missing in their coverage is where Chinese Americans are in the big picture of immigrants in the United States. Chinese newspapers tend to focus solely on Chinese immigrants. Issues shared by all immigrant communities are covered in the Chinese press as if they were problems unique to Chinese immigrants. Without a third dimension—the connection to other immigrant communities—the Chinese newspapers failed to provide the complete picture to immigrants themselves.

For example, the story in the *Ming Pao Daily* on May 27 about undocumented Chinese immigrant workers who would rather take lower-paid jobs in the relatively “safe” New York City than work for higher wages outside the city, could have included more information about workplace raids by ICE. These raids most often affected Latino immigrants working on farms and in the meatpacking industry rather than Chinese immigrants, who typically work in restaurants, but Chinese immigrants were not told that; their fears of workplace raids came from hearing about these operations. If Chinese newspapers do not inform their readers about what is going on beyond the limits of their own community, the readers will make decisions based on their fears rather than on evidence.

The story in the *China Press* on June 25 about the 17-year-old Chinese youth who showed symptoms of a mental illness could have mentioned similar cases among other immigrant communities (the most extreme being that of Cho Seung-Hui, the Virginia Tech killer who immigrated to the United States from Korea when he was 8). The lack of horizontal comparisons may have cost readers the opportunity to explore whether mental illness is a common problem for young immigrants who come to this country as preteens.

This pattern was also evident in reports about court cases. Be they about political asylum or marriage fraud, most reports in the Chinese newspapers documented the details of individual cases without providing analysis, and, therefore, failed to explain how individual incidents might affect future cases.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to assist advocates in their messaging through Chinese based media outlets. These recommendations may be helpful in working with other non-English language media.

Expand reporting by Chinese media on undocumented immigrants beyond coverage of raids, crack-downs, detentions and court cases; to broader issues like health care, education and the economy.

Encourage consistent language about “undocumented” and explain concerns about the use of “illegal.”

Build on the already existing collection of articles published by Chinese newspapers intended to help new immigrants integrate into mainstream culture. By emphasizing the policies and legislation necessary to facilitate integration, Chinese papers could also help inform and inspire readers about the role they can play in affecting policy.

Identify bridges between shared experiences with other immigrant groups, helping the Chinese press draw upon a larger connection between the experiences and challenges of Chinese immigrants and those from other ethnic communities.





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