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Let my voices be heard:

A qualitative study of migrant workers' strategies of mediation resistance in contemporary China

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MSc in Global Media and Communications

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Let my voices be heard:
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mediation resistance in contemporary China

Yijun Chen

ABSTRACT

In the mainstream media, the dominant discourse about migrant workers in the Chinese press is negative and marginalized, if not absent. A common challenge for migrant workers is their attempt to find ways of attracting media coverage for causes that are not normally in the media spotlight. However, despite some old stereotypes of migrant workers, they have had new visibility in recent years. This study aims to explore the possibility and the strategies of using media as migrant workers' weapons to articulate their voices. Seven respondents were the subjects of semi-structured interviews about their experiences of media use and their attitude toward the media. Their responses were then coded and analyzed by employing a thematic analysis. Emergent themes suggest that the migrant workers interviewed know very well that media can be a powerful weapon in their day-to-day struggles. Based on their responses, I will first reveal the operational mechanism of migrant workers' mediation resistance, then three layers of their strategies of resistance will be articulated. Those three layers are as follows: (1) *using the story as resource*; (2) *being in the story*; and (3) *compelling the media to report the story*. Each of these layers moves forward, one by one, under the conceptual framework of the mediation opportunity structure. This study concludes that in a complex space of information flows in which words, images and symbolic content compete for attention, individuals, even vulnerable individuals can seek to make themselves seen and heard through mediation resistance.

INTRODUCTION

To incorporate the Chinese socialist system into the global economy, the Chinese authorities called on rural workers to work in the city but not to stay in the city. For China's new working class, industrialization and urbanization remain two highly disconnected processes because many migrant workers have been deprived of the opportunity to live where they work. Local urban governments have had no incentive to meet labourers' collective consumption needs in terms of housing, education, medical care, and other social goods and services. Rural migrant workers have been barred de jure, but not de facto, from living in urban centers by the *hukou* system and by class barriers that have ensured that migrant workers with meagre wages cannot settle in urban communities (Solinger, 1999). The resultant pattern is an unfinished process of proletarianization, which leads to a deepening sense of becoming incomplete, that is, of becoming *nongmingong* (a 'quasi' or 'half' worker in the industrial world). The individual, suffering from a sense of inadequacy, is subjected to a process of wandering. He or she is neither a *nongmin* (peasant) nor a *gongren* (worker), but is always a *nongmingong*, somebody caught between being a rural citizen and a worker—a social identity that is always 'quasi' (Ngai & Huilin, 2010).

As vulnerable groups, migrant workers live in a society in which power is heavily concentrated in media institutions. Especially in China, the actions of those who try to obtain media attention in spite of lacking the media-production resources reveal a great deal about the normal constraints on being noticed and heard. However, this is not always the case: in recent years, some migrant workers won space to allow their voices to be heard by the public with the help of the media. For example, in 2007, Zhang, a construction worker from the Hubei province, organized and mobilized migrant workers to threaten to jump from buildings to ask for their wages back. After five successful dramatic performances without anyone dying or being hurt, he was then called a 'performance director.' In 2012, a female migrant worker uploaded a video on Weibo of herself holding a press conference to complain about her late wages. In 2013, five migrant workers in Beijing dressed in cartoon clothes with banners saying 'Retrieve my wage' to attract media attraction¹. These cases imply a new phenomenon of migrant workers taking advantage of media as their weapon of resistance. Why do migrant workers consistently choose the media instead of other channels? Lodging complaints with the government (*shangfang*) is the most common official channel for migrant workers to present their grievances. When repeated visits to the bureaus fail to

¹ http://society.kankanews.com/minsheng/2013-02-01/2326434_6.shtml (accessed on February 1, 2013).
<http://news.163.com/photoview/00AP0001/28111.html> (accessed on October 9, 2012).

deliver pensions owed, or when migrant workers are frustrated by the pro-employer decisions of labour arbitrators or judges, petitioners may take their demands from the courtrooms to the street. Savvy, shrewd workers seek to focus public attention on their plight, publicize their grievances, and undermine the image of the city as stable and therefore capital-friendly (Lee, 2007: 232-3). This phenomenon conforms to what Thompson (2005) has called the ‘new visibility’ of vulnerable groups. He has argued that

by using communication media, individuals create new forms of action and interaction that have their own distinctive properties, and it is also an explicit strategy of individuals who know very well that mediated visibility can be a weapon in the struggles they wage in their day-to-day lives. (Thompson, 2005).

This study aims to examine the relationship between the new generations of migrant workers, their usage of media and their daily struggles. This dissertation will be divided into three major chapters. First, before performing an analysis, it will provide a review of several theories in the field of media study, namely, collective and daily forms of resistance, media representation, new visibility and mediation opportunity structure. The second chapter will detail the methodology used and the overall research design. Finally, the study will draw upon a series of qualitative interviews of individuals to obtain their opinions on mediation resistance. Based on their responses, three layers of migrant workers’ resistance strategies will be articulated, primarily under the conceptual framework of mediation opportunity structure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The new character of second-generation migrant workers

Peasant-workers (nongmingong) are not a new phenomenon in China. When we refer to the first generation of dagongmei/zai, we mean those people who were born in the late 1960s and in the 1970s and who were the first to move from the countryside to work in southern China’s newly industrialized zones in the 1980s and 1990s. These pioneers were the female workers who came to work in toy and electronics factories in the Shekou—Industrial Zone of Shenzhen, the site of China’s first Special Economic Zone (Lee, 1998; Pun, 2005). The second generation of peasant-workers refers to people who were born or raised in the reform period, especially those who were born in the late 1970s and 1980s, and who entered the labor market in the late 1990s and 2000s. This category includes the children who were born to the

first generation and who grew up in either urban areas or rural communities (Pun, 2010: 493).

The rapid economic growth in the reform era has shaped a social structure in which the second generation has faced a rural-urban chasm, greater income inequality, and further social exclusion despite constant improvement in their working and living conditions (Park, Wang, and Cai, 2006). Although both the class structure and the process of an incomplete proletarianization of the new generation of *dagongmei/zai* are similar to those of the previous generation, there are new life expectations and dispositions, new nuanced meanings of work, and heightened collective labour actions among subjects who grew up during the reform period. Characteristic of the second generation's way of life is a greater disposition toward individualism, an increased proclivity for urban consumer culture (Davis, 2000; Pun, 2003; Yan, 2008), less constrained economic circumstances and greater pursuit of personal development and freedom (Jacka, 2006), a higher rate of job turnover and less loyalty to work (Smith et al., 2004), and a greater level of spontaneous collective action in the workplace (Lee, 2007; Chan and Pun, 2009). The second generation, born and raised during the reform period, is relatively better educated and better off materially but is spiritually disoriented, while maintaining a cosmopolitan outlook.

Finally, we examine migrant workers' agency. Pun Ngai and Lu Huilin (2010) have studied the sense of self, the anger, and the collective action of the second generation of migrant workers, and they have noted that migrant workers exist squarely at the centre of a grid of controls and domination where workers themselves can negotiate and articulate their own agency. Many new-generation migrant workers have shown strong faith. For example, in Pun's interview, a worker participating in a labour protest in Shenzhen in March 2003 said, "We have to rely on ourselves. We can't trust the government, we can't trust management. We simply want a speck of justice (*yidian gongping*)."

We can see that pain, anger, and suffering have nurtured the working class and have transformed its rank and file into opponents of capital. Without collective bargaining power, an effective trade union, or elected representatives, in times of distress workers often turn to the state, which invariably disappoints them, and therefore they want to find their own solutions. The observation of an array of everyday and collective instances of resistance by the new working class implies that the resistance has reached new heights in the struggle, threatening both the forces of capital and the state, which have been anxious to subdue that resistance. The first generation of migrant workers in South China were depicted as 'docile bodies' subject to the despotic regime of capital that could only utilize primarily individual means of resistance against

capital. However, the new generation of migrant workers has been more eager to mobilize the law or to use collective action to challenge the supremacy of capital directly (Lee, 1998; Lee, 2007; Pun, 2005; Chan and Pun, 2009; Pun and Lu, 2010; Chan, 2010).

Why do the migrant workers resist? Scott (1985:295) notes that the core of the rebellion is joined to the basic, material survival needs such as 'bread', 'land', and 'no taxes'. Everyday migrant politics, resistance and, of course, compliance flow from this same fundamental material need: to live. Despite the construction industry's enormous gross profits and output value, compared to most other workers, construction workers are poorly protected with respect to physical and financial risks. Suffering the consequences of an unreasonable labour subcontracting system, workers have learned that their labour rights are poorly protected. They do not usually take action until the bottom line of their consent — receiving wages at the end of the Lunar Year — has been broken. To speak of their actions, we first must provide a retrospective of previous studies' descriptions of the two existing forms of resistance.

New forms of resistance by migrant workers—mediation resistance

Scott (1985) classifies resistance into two groups — formal and informal. The first form of resistance is called collective action, which is (a) organized, systematic, and cooperative, (b) principled or selfless, (c) has revolutionary consequences, and/or (d) embodies ideas or intentions that negate the basis of domination itself. Internal migration has dominated China's social life since the onset of economic reform in 1978, as millions of people have migrated from their rural homes to China's cities and towns. Migrant workers intensify competition for limited resources and job vacancies, thus increasing tensions between city dwellers and migrant workers. There are a huge number of studies about migrant workers' collective actions (Chan & Nagi, 2009; Chan, 2001; Lee, 2002, 2007; Thireau & Hua, 2003). Many incidents of workers blocking traffic, demonstrating outside government buildings, or marching through downtown streets have their origins in mass outrage against official failures to redress legal and legitimate grievances (Lee, 2007: 232). However, there are some limitations of focusing exclusively on this type of movement. First, it is a simple fact that throughout most of history, most subordinate classes have only rarely been afforded the luxury of open, organized political activity, and they lack the social-movement experiences of mobilization and organization. Second, under the strict regulation of Chinese government, social movement activities will be repressed from the beginning. The Chinese government pursues social harmony and will not allow turbulence to occur. Therefore, collective actions are dangerous, if not suicidal. Third, although in rare cases collective actions succeed, it is a

sad fact that the consequences are seldom what the activists had in mind. Such achievements typically result in a vaster and more dominant state apparatus capable of battering its migrant subjects even more effectively than did its predecessors (Scott, 1985).

Disagreeing with the above point, Scott (1985: 292) emphasizes what he calls *everyday* forms of resistance, which (a) are unorganized, unsystematic, and individual, (b) are opportunistic and self-indulgent, (c) have no revolutionary consequences, and/or (d) imply, in their intention or meaning, accommodation with a system of domination. Like foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so on (Scott, 1985), which require little or no coordination or planning, everyday forms of resistance use implicit understandings and informal networks. They often represent a form of individual self-help. They typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority. In Scott's (1985: 37) opinion, what is missing from the picture of periodic explosions is the underlying vision of justice that informs those explosions and their specific goals and targets, which are often quite rational indeed. The explosions themselves are frequently signs that normal and largely covert forms of class struggle either are failing or have reached a crisis point. Such everyday forms of resistance are well suited to migrants' social structure. More importantly, such resistance can accumulate into the vast aggregation that finally makes an utter shambles of the policies dreamed up by their would-be superiors in the capital.

Scott's everyday forms of resistance do provide great insights into migrants' actions, but this framework also has some limitations when fit to the new generation of migrant workers. First, this study was conducted in a small village of Malaysia, where most subjects are true peasants who have hardly ever left their rural homeland and heavily rely on it. However, the new generation of migrant workers has moved into the cities and even been born there, which means that they have a weak tie to their homeland and are familiar with different political-economic functions. Second, as mentioned in the first part, the characteristics of the new generation of migrant workers are that the new generation is more open and has agency, which imbues it with more potential to strive for its legitimate rights. Third, the new generation of migrant workers seems to learn something about media logic due to more accessible approaches to media tools. Therefore, Scott's model of everyday forms of resistance is too gentle and moderate to understand the Chinese context.

In summary, collective actions seem to be too radical and profession-linked for migrant workers to apply. Conversely, everyday forms of resistance have become so gentle that the

new generations of migrant workers' ability and media literacy have rendered them powerful enough to surpass those forms of resistance. Based on the two previous forms of resistance above, I argue for a third model – *mediation resistance*, which is a middle ground that helps fill the gap between collective actions and everyday forms of resistance. The term 'mediation resistance' refers to migrant workers using media as their weapon of resistance.

The image of migrant workers in mainstream media

Despite some sympathetic tones, the 'dominant discourse' about migrant workers in the Chinese press is negative, presenting them at best as a social problem and often as a major threat to civil order and progress. Officially, they are categorized as 'temporary residents' (*zhanzhu renyuan*), but in reality, they are treated as secondary citizens or aliens with fewer rights than permanent urban residents. No matter how long they have lived and worked in the city, migrants are treated as peasants and 'outsiders' (*waidiren*) who should and will eventually return to their rural homes (Zhang, 2002: 279). Poor migrants are rarely given a name or a face, migrants are regarded as part of an abstract group, and their movement has been portrayed in terms of a 'roam', a 'wave', or a 'flood,' connoting uncontrollable and devastating natural forces, while 'drifting' and 'floating' highlight the socially and politically problematic concept of chaos (Kochan, 2009). In the mainstream media, workers and peasants have gradually become marginalized, even disappeared. More precisely, they mostly appear in human-interest stories in conjunction with mining accidents, violent crimes and other bloody incidents. As such, these groups have been denigrated as 'objects' and 'others' (Zhao, 2010).

A common challenge for migrant workers is to attempt to find ways to attract media coverage for causes that are not normally in the media spotlight. Migrant workers as vulnerable group live in a society where power is heavily concentrated in media institutions. Especially in China, the actions of those who try to obtain media attention in spite of lacking media-production resources reveal a great deal about the normal constraints on being noticed and heard. However, is that always the case? Thompson (2005) addresses the 'new visibility' to illustrate the phenomenon of people winning space to allow their voices to be heard by the public with the help of the media. He argues (2005: 3) that "communication media are not merely technical devices that transmit information from one individual to another while leaving their relationship unchanged; rather, by using communication media, individuals create new forms of action and interaction which have their own distinctive properties". In this new world of mediated visibility, making actions and events visible is not just the

outcome of leakage in systems of communication and information flow that are increasingly difficult to control; it is also an explicit strategy of individuals who know very well that mediated visibility can be a weapon in the struggles they wage in their day-to-day lives (Thompson, 2005). The next section will focus on how migrant workers fight for their visibility under the conceptual framework of mediation opportunity structure.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Cammaerts (2012) argues that mediation opportunity structure is a fruitful concept to encompass a wide variety of ways in which communications and the media are relevant to protest and resistance. The term ‘mediation opportunity structure’ refers to mainstream media representations of protest and movements, to movements ‘becoming the media’ and counter-spinning, and to media and communication practices that constitute protest and resistance in their own right. Mediation opportunity structure encompasses three interrelated opportunity structures: media opportunity structure, discursive opportunity structure and networked opportunity structure.

The first one of these, media opportunity structure, relates to mainstream media representations of protest, focusing on various ways in which activists attempt to attract the media’s attention by producing a *spectacle* through a show of numbers, by inflicting damage or by bearing witness to injustice. Migrant workers are eager to draw support from symbolic forms, which include discourse and images of symbols (such as their clothing, badges, stickers, and scars on their bodies) that ready them for media coverage. The second structure, discursive opportunity, focuses more on strategies of *self-mediation* geared toward producing counter-narratives and disseminating them independent from mainstream media organizations. This opportunity structure requires more agency than the first because self-mediation encourages the original ‘to hack’ the mainstream media into ‘being the media’ rather than hating it (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002: 132). The last one, networked opportunity structure, addresses resistance practices mediated through technology. This ties the discursive back to action because Information and Communication Technology (ICT) increasingly sustains movements, coordinates direct action and becomes tool of direct action in its own right (Cammaerts, 2012: 122). In terms of networked opportunity structure, this opportunity structure is normally linked with people who possess both fundamental equipment and proper ICT knowledge. However, in recent studies some scholars have proven that vulnerable groups such as migrant workers are also capable of adapting a networked opportunity structure. As Qiu (2009) notes, workers’ rights advocates and advocacy groups

are becoming heavily reliant on working-class information and communication technology (ICT) – that is, inexpensive Internet and mobile phone services such as QQ, which is a social media network favored by Chinese students and the working class. In the meantime, a small but growing number of rural migrant workers are consciously using the cameras on their mobile phones to engage in varying levels of political and cultural activism. The networked opportunity structure may take the form of using a mobile phone camera to record and share images of collective industrial actions against capitalist management, as evidenced in the Honda automobile plant in Fuzhou in 2010, and throughout the electronics-manufacturing sector in other parts of China (Qiu, 2012). It may also aim to carve out a new space in which an alternative story about migrant workers' daily struggles can be told, and whereby marginal groups gain voice and visibility. At the same time, with the ubiquitous use of mobile phones, anyone can take a photo, and the widespread use of the Internet means that an increasing number of people have the means to publish their photos online. The manifold articulations of mediation illustrate that media and communication not only are relevant to the symbolic and discursive realms in which resistance operates but also are instrumental and material to realizing their immediate goals.

The mediation opportunity structure is adaptable for analyzing how Chinese migrant workers use media as their weapons of resistance. Chinese migrant workers have become more aware and conscious of the mediation opportunity structure through their lay knowledge of how the mainstream media and technologies operate, partially adapting to or appropriating them. By interviewing Chinese migrant workers, three layers of their resistance strategies will be articulated. Those strategies are as follows: (1) *using the story as resource*; (2) *being in the story*; and (3) *compelling the media to report the story*. Each of them goes forward, one by one, under the conceptual framework of the mediation opportunity structure.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective of this research is to produce qualitative insights into the relationship between migrant workers and media usage in terms of resistance through semi-structured interviews. As previously discussed, there are studies and theories surrounding media representation, ICT usage, and different forms of resistance (namely, collective forms and everyday forms) by migrant workers. However, the literature does not yet include any articles that combine media usage and migrant workers' resistance. Although the common challenge for migrant workers is their attempt to find ways to attract media coverage to causes that are not normally in the media spotlight, cases have recently accumulated in China involving migrant

workers that are constantly adopting both symbolic and discursive forms to attract the media. This study aims to fill that gap by creating a new form of resistance, mediation resistance, to illustrate this new phenomenon among migrant workers. There are qualitative studies of migrant workers' use of media tools to determine feasibility along with strategies applied by those workers in the course of their resistance. Based on Thompson's new visibility theory, I have formulated the following research question:

RQ1: Is there any possibility for migrant workers to have their voices heard through the media?

Additionally, I consider the following sub-question:

RQ2: If so, how do they accomplish that goal?

In the following section, I will use the mediation opportunity structure (Cammaerts, 2012) as my conceptual framework, combined with interviews of migrant workers, to prove the above hypothesis.

Research design

To accomplish these research objectives, a qualitative methodology was needed. More specifically, in-depth interviews were chosen as the most appropriate approach to examine the research questions at issue. There are many reasons for this choice. Surveys and questionnaires are not feasible for use with migrant workers due to their generally low literacy levels. Furthermore, the answers provided by questionnaires permit a smaller amount of unexpected information. In comparison, interview questions are almost an invitation to the respondent to talk at length, in his or her own words, and with time to reflect. The researcher can obtain clarification and amplification of interesting points, with appropriate probing and targeted questioning (Bauer: 2000: 45). Another methodology – content analysis (here, a content analysis of newspapers was considered) – systematically identifies specified characteristics of the message, which might provide observations of trends, patterns and developments of changing proportions along with a different way for migrant workers to use the media as their weapon of resistance (Krippendorff, 1980). However, content analysis does not provide insight into motivations or why migrant workers behaved as they did. Furthermore, content analysis provides a relatively clear overview of a

large number of texts, but it cannot cope with depth analysis of a small number of texts or symbolic meanings. An interview

provides a ‘thick description’ of a particular social milieu; it seeks to dig out intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 11); it may provide empirical data to test expectations and hypotheses developed from a particular theoretical perspective. (Gaskell, 2000)

Thus, it was determined that a qualitative research strategy would be employed, but the next question that arose was which of those qualitative methodologies would be the most appropriate for my study.

Ethnographic research and participant observation have their strengths and advantages – to name some, the researcher experiences a greater depth of experience and is able to be involved in the participant’s world, thus allowing for the spotting of inconsistencies for him or herself (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000: 44). However, ethnographic research and participant observation are less well suited to answering my research question than are interviews. As Berger (2011: 135) argues, interviews “enable researchers to obtain information that they cannot gain by observation alone”, that is, interviews enable the researcher to go beyond pure observation and provide the opportunity to converse with the respondents to better understand their attitudes and beliefs.

In his media and communication research methods, Berger (2011: 136) outlines four types of individual interviews: informal, unstructured, semi-structured, and structured interviews. For this study, the process of semi-structured interviews was employed due to its structured yet flexible nature. Unstructured and informal interviews, although useful for certain studies, would be too unfocused for the limited scope of this dissertation and would not ensure that the researcher would be able to cover certain topics of interest to this study. Conversely, structured interviews do not allow for the same spontaneity and flexibility as semi-structured interviews and accordingly, they leave little room for previously unconsidered issues and topics to emerge (Bryman, 2004: 320). Thus, it was determined that semi-structured interviews would be the most appropriate for this study due to their flexible yet organized manner. Additionally, individual interviews were chosen over focus groups for three reasons. First, not all of those who are invited attend, and some target groups are difficult to recruit. Second, it is not feasible to focus attention on a particular individual in a group discussion in the same way as in a one-to-one interview. With the single respondent, far richer detail about

personal experiences, decisions and action sequences can be elicited, with probing follow-up questions focusing on motivations in the context of detailed information about the person's particular circumstances. What the interviewee says, and how the interview develops, can be related to other relevant characteristics of the individual in a manner that is not possible within the discussion and subsequent analysis of a focus group (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000: 48). Third, individual interviews also avoid undesired group dynamics, such as one group member dominating the conversation, fears about confidentiality, and distrust of other group members (Berger, 2011: 137). This approach helps assure that respondents will speak directly from their 'vessels of answers', not in response to the presence of others (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997: 118). In summary, an individually semi-structured interview is so open and interactive between the researcher and the respondent that it can be accepted as the most appropriate methodology for my research.

Although interviews are better than other methodologies for understanding respondents' diversity of opinions, in-depth interviews have some potential disadvantages. Interviews tend to produce a 'formidable' amount of data (Berger, 1998: 57), making it time-consuming to analyze; additionally, some unexpected issues and problems arose during my interviews. First, contacting and building rapport with migrant workers is very difficult. Most migrant workers cannot afford computers: they use mobile phones to connect to the Internet. That made spontaneous interaction almost impossible. Sometimes they replied to my chat message many days later. However, the crucial problem is one of trust. When I began online-chatting with migrant workers, almost every one of them doubted my identity and aims. Some even thought I was a police officer who wanted to accumulate evidence about them. One of the migrant workers said:

There's no reason to have an interview if you are not a journalist. Can you solve my problem? What you make me feel is that you just watch the scene like many college students do. Never will you know the desperation and hardship of asking for your money back! (Worker C)

Some migrant workers believe they are being taken advantage of. As a result, approaching them and earning their trust may not be an easy task. In fact, two migrant workers who were my intended interviewees refused to grant me interviews after noticing that I was not a journalist who could provide them with media exposure. This outcome was a bit depressing, but their rejections proved my argument that migrant workers believe media can help them to protect their rights. This reaction also reminded me that sometimes interviewers need to articulate the benefits and long-term advantages of their studies to persuade utilitarian interviewees. In the meantime, the interviewer must establish a climate for mutual

disclosure. According to Holstein (1997: 119), the interview should be an occasion that displays the interviewer's willingness to share his or her own feelings, and deepest thoughts which helps respondent's reciprocal revelations. This approach involves the use of many interaction strategies and tactics, largely based on an understanding of friendly feelings and intimacy, to optimize cooperative, mutual disclosure and a creative search for mutual understanding (1985: 25). In addition, the ability to manage conversation is crucial to the success of an interview. Becker and Geer (1957) suggest that interviewers probe assiduously for more details than the interviewee may offer as his or her first reply to a question. The need to do so was obvious when I interacted with migrant workers. They sometimes replied only with a yes or no, and all gave simple answers. Therefore, I needed to constantly guide them and continue to ask how, what, when and why to explore more necessary details. Finally, migrant workers come from different rural areas in China, which requires the interviewer to understand the 'local language' — i.e., to be accustomed to local accents and slang. Despite the potential weaknesses of interviews and need for extra attention at certain points, they are, as previously discussed, inherently advantageous in a number of ways, thus making them the most appropriate method for this dissertation.

Methods

Random sampling is not suitable for this research because my dissertation aims to explore migrant workers' mediation resistance, therefore requires respondents to have experience with using newspapers, television programs, the Internet and other forms of media to protect their rights. Because of this limited scope, 'purposeful sampling' (Patton, 2002) was needed: most migrant workers do not have the opportunity to use media. The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. "Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations" (Patton, 2002: 230). All of the respondents should meet the criterion of being migrant workers who have experiences of weaponizing the media to protect their rights. Thus, seven migrant workers were chosen for interviews via a purposeful sampling technique. Two of them were located through media coverage, whereas others were discovered through migrant workers' online-chatting platforms. Due to relatively low ICT adoption, however, only a limited number of migrant workers have experience with using media to resist and therefore, respondents were difficult to find. When conducting further research, a more exhaustive and a larger study could benefit from reaching a greater range of migrant workers.

The interviews were conducted primarily over the QQ audio-talk platform, with the exception of one interview at a respondent's home in the Jiangsu Province. At the beginning of each interview, I introduced myself and the aims of the research project. The interviews usually covered three major topics. A detailed topic guide can be found in Appendix 1. Depending on the circumstances, the sequence of the questions would vary, and digression and probing sometimes occurred. The interviews lasted from 20-35 minutes. All of the interviews were recorded using a recording device and were later listened to multiple times and copied verbatim. Prior to the interviews, confidentiality was promised. After the interviews were transcribed and formatted, hard copies of transcripts were printed out for the first round of analysis. Thematic analysis was chosen as the most suitable form of data analysis due to its exceptional 'flexibility' (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 78). In the coding process, themes and concepts will resurge and be identified (Ezzy, 2002: 88). All of the interviews were conducted in Chinese. Transcription and translation were performed soon after the interviews. However, they may omit important denotations such as facial expressions, implications and irony. To compensate for this lack, both verbal and non-verbal behaviors should be recorded in the transcription. Additionally, it is worth noting that interviews may arouse feelings of inferiority: for example, worker C constantly used the phrases 'you citizens' and 'us migrant workers' to differentiate himself from me. Therefore, debriefing and comfort cannot be omitted.

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

Due to the iterative process of research and analysis, the interview topic guide evolved to encourage certain themes that emerged during interviews. In the study, seven migrant workers were deliberately chosen to represent three types of mediation resistance by migrant workers in contemporary China. Therefore, some qualitative conclusions were made based on the interviewees' statements. All of the interviewees in this research had experience with being covered or taking the initiative to contact the media initiatively to cover his/her story.

Profiles of interviewees

- Worker A, male, age 35, is a construction worker from Jiangsu Province. His wages have been held for seven months. After visiting all the departments he could find, he chose to wear an ancient Chinese costume in front of the local newspaper hall. Questioned and then covered by a journalist, he successfully asked for his money.
- Worker B, female, age 41. Ten years ago, she wrote a letter to the *Yanfu Diario Popular* newspaper (a local newspaper in Jiangsu Province), complaining that her manager owed her 5200 RMB. After the newspaper published her story, she got her money back.
- Worker C, male, age 40, is a decoration worker. His employer has been in arrears for nearly a year. To obtain his money before the Chinese New Year, he held a banner on the business street near the Taicang government offices to attract passers-by and journalists. Finally, a police car found him and helped him to ask for his money.
- Worker D, male, age 33, is a decoration worker who worked for the same company as worker C. He asked for his money back by holding a banner with worker C.
- Worker E, male, age 24, is a construction worker from Zhejiang Province. He posted a notice at a Baidu paste bar searching for media help in exposing his manager's violation of his pre-work contract by failing to pay his wages at the end of the month. As of the date that this dissertation was completed, worker E still has not found anyone who can help him seek justice.
- Worker F, male, age 53, is a cementer from Chongqing Municipality. With the help of his son-in-law, he wrote a poem describing how his manager kept his money and treated him rudely by using a wounded photo as his profile on Tengxun Weibo. After his poem was retweeted and commented on thousands of times, Xinhua newspaper covered his story, and he eventually received his arrears money.
- Worker G, male, age 38, is a decoration worker in Shanghai. He created a large QQ group named 'arrears group of migrant workers', which provides migrant workers with an online platform to interact and share their experiences of owed wages.

The possibility of being read and heard

A common challenge for migrant workers is their attempts to find ways to attract media coverage for causes that are not normally in the media spotlight. However, this is not always the case. In recent years, some migrant workers have obtained space to allow their voices to be heard by the public, with the help of the media. For example, in 2007, Zhang, a construction worker from Hubei Province, organized and mobilized migrant workers to threaten to jump from buildings to ask for their back wages. After five successful dramatic performances without anyone dying or being hurt, he was called a ‘performance director.’ In 2012, a female migrant worker uploaded a video on Weibo of herself holding a press conference to complain about her back wages. In 2013, five migrant workers in Beijing dressed themselves in cartoon clothes with banners saying ‘Retrieve my wage’ to attract media attention². These media-related cases remind people of what Thompson (2005) calls the ‘new visibility’ of vulnerable groups. He argues that

by using communication media, individuals create new forms of action and interaction that have their own distinctive properties, and it is also an explicit strategy of individuals who know very well that mediated visibility can be a weapon in the struggles that they wage in their day-to-day lives. (Thompson, 2005).

This study’s interviewees have something in common — they all have experiences of being covered or of contacting media for coverage, and many interviewees expressed the feeling that they have more space to articulate their stories.

At that time, I believed that I could do something. Times are different now. Even Premier Wen is concerned about a rural woman’s wage. Who dares to reject our petitions? What I should do is simply take my pen and write to the newspaper about my story. (Worker B)

Resorting to legal procedures has taken most of my time and money, and what have I received? Nothing! However, using media is another story. I can release online messages by my mobile phone when I feel that I need to do so. People will then hear my words and reply to me. (Worker E)

² http://society.kankanews.com/minsheng/2013-02-01/2326434_6.shtml (accessed on 01, February, 2013)
<http://news.163.com/photoview/00AP0001/28111.html> (accessed on 09, October, 2012).

These seven migrant workers' stories illustrate the possibility of using media to allow their voices to be read and heard. Furthermore, through the Internet, migrant workers have more possibilities than ever before. They can even compel the media to cover them (more analysis of this point will be illustrated below). However, not each migrant worker can be as lucky as my interviewees were since they are typical examples among the millions of migrant workers in China. As worker B noted, her successful case happened during a time in which the Chinese government emphasized 'constructing social harmony' and thus paid greater attention to vulnerable people's livelihood. Although worker E thought it was convenient for him to articulate his words through Internet, it is important to remember one precondition: equipment such as a computer or a mobile phone are required to connect to the Internet, but most migrant workers cannot afford it. In summary, the possibility of being read and heard by the media is no longer improbable, but it does have some limitations and occurs only under particular circumstances. Therefore, analyzing how migrant workers use the media to increase the possibility of being read and heard is crucial for vulnerable groups that are in the process of resistance. In the next sections, the operational mechanism of mediation resistance will be illustrated first, then three main strategies will be generalized according to statements from the interviewees, each of them advancing one by one under the framework of mediation opportunity structure. Those strategies are as follows: (1) *using the story as resource*; (2) *being in the story*; and (3) *compelling the media to report the story*.

The operational mechanism and strategies of mediation resistance

Based on the two forms of resistance illustrated in the previous sections, I propose a third model — *mediation resistance* — which is a middle ground to help fill the gap between collective actions and everyday forms of resistance. Mediation resistance is a method for migrant workers of weaponizing the media to resist in their daily struggles. China has multiple channels for political participation, including elections, petitions, lawsuits, and media reports. However, the mere availability of channels does not mean that those channels are effective. In recent years, relaying grievances to the media at times results in significant help (Cai, 2008: 165). Why is mediation resistance so useful in China? The responses of migrant workers may provide some insights.

If the journalists come, I will win the battle of obtaining my arrears. [...] More people come to know what a bad manager has done to us, more accusations will be publicly made. The local government hates negative reports: it will solve my problem so that it can earn compliments.
(Worker A)

I just imitated what people always do on TV programs. I believe that if I can appear on a TV show, I will be famous, too. I will not have to worry about my wages after becoming famous. [...] My wife said that if my story was to be exposed by the media, my wage would be paid for sure. [...] I am too powerless to ask for my wage, but journalists have the power to help me through their coverage. When the coverage comes out, more people can read my story, and the conscienceless manager will be blamed. Then, I will receive my money. (Worker C)

The central and provincial governments are highly likely to intervene when a case involves casualties and is disclosed by the media. Casualties and media coverage impose serious pressure on local authorities, including provincial governments (Cai, 2008: 169). The mechanism for migrant workers' mediation resistance can be briefly concluded in three steps. First, they cause disruptions that attract media attention. Second, they use the media as an amplifier of public opinion, and then impose pressure on higher-level officials. Finally, the higher-level officials can pressure either the subordinate officials directly responsible for the case or the firm to pay the wages and pensions (Lee, 2007: 234). That may explain why migrant workers spare no effort to appeal for media attention: they want to 'be famous' and to 'be read by more people'. They want to get their money back by using public opinion to pressure the government. In terms of catching the media's eye, there are three main strategies, which are described in the sections below.

Using the story as a resource

First, using the story as a resource means to use existing media narratives as a resource for negotiating with managers and local authorities. The extent to which migrant workers can use media narratives is highly relevant to the state's changing attitudes.

Worker B told me that she was successfully asked her money back in the form of writing a complaint letter to *Yanfu Diario Popular* newspaper (a local newspaper in Jiangsu Province). However, the crucial issue is how a powerless peasant woman without a sensational story can easily obtain local newspaper coverage. Worker B remembered when she wrote that letter: it was right before an ordinary peasant worker, Xiong Deming,³ retrieved her wage with the help of former Premier Wen. Xiong's unexpected and brief exchange with the premier had become a catalyst for a nationwide 'wage-seeking storm', prompting central and local

³ Xiong Deming, a woman living in a poverty-stricken village in Southwest China, complained to Premier Wen Jiabao about a local construction firm that defaulted on her husband's wage. The premier intervened without delay. Xiong's family not only received the overdue money, but five days later, the county government also paid the wages owed to all other workers on the project. Literally overnight, Xiong became known nationwide.

governments to launch numerous rules and regulations prohibiting wage arrearages (Sun, 2012). In that unique political context, worker B retrieved her wage by taking advantage of her good timing.

Seeing many reports about migrant workers greatly inspired me, Xiong's story in particular touched me a lot and gave me confidence that I could retrieve my wage. If Xiong can do that, so can I! I don't think that our government does not care about us: they just haven't heard about my experience. Therefore, I need to hand over my story. However, how can I let the premier know what I have experienced? I was wondering what the premier liked to read in his spare time. He must read the newspaper, I guessed, so I wrote a letter to the local newspaper to have my story read. (Worker B)

The manager returned my wage. Surprisingly, he pleaded with me not to bring him any more trouble. He said, 'Just be a docile worker, working hard in the factory as usual.' (Worker B)

In my conversations with worker B, it was obvious that she did not realize the key point of why her story had been covered. Instead, she attributed the coverage to having imitated what other migrant workers had done. Nevertheless, worker B's case can still be regarded as typical. Xiong's story became the political fairy tale par excellence in reformed China, with the former premier and his government as the charming prince incarnate, ready to save the struggling peasant woman and the 300 million Chinese peasants she represented. In the same way that media and popular culture anywhere relish producing fairy tales, the Chinese media were enamoured with Wen-Xiong's story (Sun, 2012). After receiving compliments and advocacy from ordinary people, the Chinese government paid more attention to migrant workers' issues. The changes in state attitudes embodied in mainstream media shows that the government paid more attention to vulnerable groups' livelihood issues.

Ten years after Xiong's experience, the Xi-Li government again raised the issue regarding migrant workers. In a recent CCTV news report that aired on July 30, 2014,⁴ Premier Li Keqiang presided over a state council executive meeting and assigned the task of serving the migrant workers. Premier Li emphasized migrant workers' magnificent contributions to propelling socioeconomic development. He clearly stated that "migrant workers deserve equal fundamental public services" and "equal rights" and that they never should have been treated as "second-class citizens"⁵. In this new political environment, the new generation of

⁴ <http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2014/07-30/6442832.shtml> (accessed on 30, July, 2014).

⁵ <http://finance.sina.com.cn/china/20140730/204319866040.shtml> (accessed on 30, July, 2014).

migrant workers is entitled to space, even more than they were in Xiong's era. Their ability to use media narratives to resist has increased. For the sake of brevity, I focussed on worker B's case, but I suggest that studies should continue under the new political environment.

Being in the story

Second, being in the story means that migrant workers draw support from symbolic forms, including discourse and images of symbols (such as clothing, badges, stickers, and the scars on their bodies) to make themselves ready material for the television and cameras. In worker A, C and D's stories, they attempted to use symbolic forms to create spectacles and dramas to attract the attention of the mainstream media.

I wanted to wear something special to be more conspicuous. When I went to a clothing store, a Chinese-style unlined upper garment caught my eye. I said to myself, 'That's it! Imagine how astonished people will be when they see me dressed like ancient Chinese people. The media won't let the opportunity for this kind of performance go, and that fit my wishes exactly!' (Worker A)

I wrote 'Return Us Our Blood and Sweat Money!' on my banner. The words were painted in black with 'Blood and Sweat' in red to make it more appealing (to passers-by and the media). [...] They won't notice us unless we do something abnormal and surprising. (Worker C)

Being in the story to adapt the media opportunity structure relates to the mainstream media's representation of protest, focusing on various ways in which activists attempt to catch the media's attention, primarily by creating a *spectacle* through a show of numbers, through inflicting damage or through bearing witness to injustice (Cammaerts, 2012: 122). This research only studies individual, non-violent examples and therefore, creating spectacle through numbers and damage are not matters of concern. Instead, this research examines the logic of bearing witness (Cammaerts, 2012), which means that resistance through public performance and civic disobedience is highly relevant to illustrating the respondents' actions. Migrant workers understand how to attract mainstream media attention. Worker A and C's transcripts both contain phrases such as 'astonished,' 'abnormal,' 'surprising' and 'performance', and they believe that only by doing something unusual they can attract media attention. This finding is consistent with Halloran et al.'s (1970) conclusion that in covering resistance, the mainstream media primarily focuses on incidents of violence, on the spectacle, rather than on the large majority of peaceful activists and the causes that they promote. "As

protest becomes less unconventional, it also becomes less noticeable and newsworthy” (Dalton, 1996: 71). Props such as ancient clothing and red-highlighted banners are workers’ repertoires to attract media focus and further the aims of their resistance. Moreover, migrant workers seem to know how to use their props with maximum efficiency — that is, how to combine their props with time, location and other effects.

I knelt down with the banner on the cross road of the business street behind our [working factory in a] development zone. People stopped to read because they were curious about what I wrote on the banner. That’s not something to honor. [...] Because there are many people on the business street, the more people see my banner, the higher the possibility of success. Moreover, the street is just a ten-minute walk from the Taicang government offices. If I continue to kneel here, someone has to take responsibility for me. (Worker C)

Xiong’s successful story gave great encouragement to us. Many newspapers and TV programs reported about her without a stop. We knew that Premier Wen is concerned about migrant workers’ cold and warmth, hunger and poverty. Right now, no one will neglect our complaints or unequal treatment. (Worker B)

The strategies used by the workers fully embody the principle of ‘the right place at the right time’. Migrant workers often chose symbolic locations, such as places close to government halls, or crowded business streets. Moreover, they take advantage of timing — for example, when worker B sent her complaint letter during a time that the media cared about Xiong’s success and the Chinese government strongly emphasized migrant workers’ living conditions. Migrant workers only have a small amount of symbolic power (Thompson, 1995), but this type of symbolic power can be greatly expanded by the media. Migrant workers become part of the story by creating spectacles at special times and in special spaces where they will attract media interest.

Cammaerts (2012) notes that mainstream media resonance presents activists with a paradoxical dilemma: protesters are forced to choose between legitimate peaceful protest events on the one hand, which is not exactly newsworthy anymore, or more disruptive, spectacular protests on the other hand, which have a greater chance of being reported but with a higher probability of negative reporting. Thus, the media has the ability to distinguish between ‘good’ and peaceful versus ‘bad’ and violent protesters (Cammaerts, 2013). The challenge for activists that is posed by the media opportunity structure can thus be summarized as follows: How can a protest be disruptive enough to become newsworthy,

careful enough to avoid interference with others, and yet peaceful enough to avoid any hint of violence? (Scalmer, 2002: 142).

The migrant workers interviewed for this essay leveraged the mainstream media's character by creating spectacle and drama, making themselves highly visible and creating ample media resonance. At the same time, their usage of mediation resistance tactics is carefully designed not to break the bottom line of the law, thus avoiding stigmatization by the mainstream media.

The media need ratings. If I don't try something new, they won't even notice me. However, regarding what you said about jumping from buildings or something like that, I think those protesters were crossing the line. To me, I will never act like that. [...] You know, people like us need strategies to obtain our wages back. If I wait without doing anything, no one will give me my money. In addition, I have only held a banner, not broken the law. The police have no reason to arrest me. I wrote my story on the banner. Good-hearted people could help me. Otherwise, I have done nothing to them. I didn't disturb anybody. (Worker C)

[...] It's stupid to act in that way [i.e. to commit suicide]. There are already too many reports of someone jumping from a building, someone holding a knife to threaten a manager. People get used to that kind of news. (Worker A)

Almost all of my interviewees characterize violent action as something risky and unworthy; instead, they prefer 'mild' strategies. The side effects of violent resistance are embodied in two ways. First, instead of being moved to action and intervention, narratives imbued with the pathos of tragedy and a strong heroic image seeking social justice on behalf of the weak have gradually lost their attractiveness and fallen victim to audiences' 'compassion fatigue' (Cohen, 1973). This is in accordance with Sun's (2012: 872) point that migrant workers gradually have adopted a more detached stance, so much so that workers are depicted as copycats, prone to melodrama and, though deserving of sympathy for the injustice that they suffer, not capable of defending their rights appropriately. Second, if workers go too far, radical tactics may not only alienate their constituency but also incur state repression (Szymanski, 2003). The choice between efficacy and safety appears to be a trade-off, and it requires skill to obtain both at the same time. Migrant workers adapt themselves to the media logic by using the strategy of what Xi Chen (2007: 254) calls 'troublemaking tactics' in today's China. Troublemaking is not as big an event as collective action, but it is powerful enough to catch the media's eye. More specifically, protesters do not take a principled or consistent position toward being either obedient or defiant but are ready to employ any tactics they find

useful. Worker A, C and D all told me that they would give up standing on the street once they retrieved their wage because they don't want to "cause trouble for the government" (worker A). Obedient tactics help protesters define their behavior as reasonable, legitimate and legal (Perry, 2007: 280), thus creating more space for migrant workers to resist.

Moving from relying on government power to attempting to adapt to mainstream media's logic more consciously than when using the first type of resistance, in the second type, migrant workers try to become the actors to attract media attention. Migrant workers seem to find a balance between obedience and resistance and a way to keep their bottom line detour between breaking the law and attracting media attentions.

Compelling the media to report the story

The third type of resistance involves forcing the media to give migrant workers their voices. It is the most dramatic type of resistance, tightly linked with self-mediation that self-produced radical media has the ability to open discursive spaces otherwise constrained and controlled by the mainstream media. Moreover, producing one's own media is empowering (McCurdy, 2010: 50). Individuals and collectives can present themselves on their own terms, using their own images and words.

Worker A asked for his money back by posting poems on Tengxun Weibo. This action not only attracted mainstream media attention but also increased migrant workers' awareness of the utility of new media. The arrears money poem reads as follows:⁶

Hardship of us, weariness of us. Earning wage far away from home, working to death for half a year. Manager owed me ten thousand wage, taking IOU to ask him. Villain rejected with a fist, broken my nose-bone without wage. Knocking departments door by door, prevaricate of them of course. Seventies' parents lament with tears, high blood pressure lie in bed. Wife and children calculate on my wage, weeping myself without food. Too hard for migrant workers to ask wage back! Where can I find justice in the world? (Worker A)

Considering that sensational stories are more likely to attract media attention, normal stories like that of worker F lose their competitiveness in attracting news coverage. However, by leveraging the networked opportunity structure (Cammaerts, 2012), even voiceless people

⁶ See in: <http://t.qq.com/wb31799106>.

can engage in *self-mediation* independently from mainstream media organizations. This poem was retweeted and commented on more than three thousand times. Worker F used an image of his own photo — a beaten face with his nose bleeding — as his Weibo profile. The photo was taken immediately after worker F's manager had beaten him with his own mobile phone. ICTs like mobile phones have led protesters to photograph and film what they are seeing and experiencing, and subsequently posting everything on social network platforms, thereby producing an ever-expanding archive of images and self-representations of protest events. The material and permanent nature of these protest artifacts enables the symbols and discourses embedded in them to be culturally transmitted on a long-term basis, feeding the struggle and contributing to the construction of a collective memory of protest. After writing this poem, worker F became well known. Even the Xinhua news agency interviewed him. Thus, he successfully attracted media attention. Now he tells me that he tweets everything relevant to arrears on Weibo in real time. Worker F considers new media as 'a new space' for vulnerable groups to articulate their voices and compared to new media, traditional media seems unnecessary to provide space for individual articulations.

I think Weibo is the best platform for the grassroots to speak out loudly, I wrote the poem because every word of it is from my heart. [...] Although I didn't know any journalists at the time, I became the journalist myself by writing my story on the Internet. I didn't see any difference between the newspaper and Weibo because I also have my readers: Netizens are my readers. (Worker F)

The same arguments could be found in both worker E and worker G's conversations.

Finding a lawyer to consult costs money, but posting your confusion on the Internet is completely free. Many people who have had the same experience will give you advice and help you. I believe that if I insist on doing so (posting inquiries on the Internet), journalists will finally see my posts. (Worker E)

I don't count on journalists. No one can save you but you. QQ provides us a great communications platform to exchange opinions and countermeasures. We struggle for the same goals, we suffer from the same experiences, we tremble for the same reasons. Although we haven't met before, we come together due to the Internet and feel like brothers and sisters! (Worker G)

Migrant workers' penchant for exploiting media publicity does not stop with producing spectacular images of protests on newspapers or TV. Instead, new data show that the Internet

is gradually becoming another space for migrant workers to let their voices be heard. The Internet provides workers with extensive mediation opportunities to independently provide information, to debate internally, and to link directly with those interested in their cause in a cost-efficient way, potentially across the time-space continuum (Cammaerts, 2005). Qiu (2009) argues that although ‘new media events’ are dramatically different from televised events, rituals and ceremonies – which are sleek in presentation, grand in scale and often take place in important spaces – they can nevertheless raise public awareness and effect real social change. With new media, these images may have a much longer time span than that expected from the traditional media, especially given the well-documented high uptake and creative use of mobile phones and low-end ICT among migrant workers.

When interviewing worker G, he often mentioned the QQ group he created, and how the initial individuals bonded based on the communication platform. Coincidentally, migrant worker F also has very close relationships with other migrant workers who use Weibo. He described an official Weibo named ‘Labor’⁷, which also has many geographical branches such as ‘Gansu Labor’, ‘Liaoning Labor’, ‘Chengdu Labor’ and so on. Worker F usually contacts those Netizens to exchange experiences with obtaining arrears and even find journalists and lawyers to help other migrant workers in the same situation that he used to be in. All of that information implies that migrant workers’ usage of new media is far more than self-mediation that compels mainstream media to report their stories. Instead, the online communities formed by these individuals are oriented toward action. This situation inspires me to use online migrant workers’ communities as subjects in future studies. Through the power of the new media, migrant workers not only empower themselves with new spaces to articulate their own voices but also are capable of exchanging experiences, organizing, even mobilizing conventions through the new media platforms. Given increasing literacy and the decreasing costs of ICT equipment, migrant workers’ resistance based on online community requires more research.

CONCLUSION

⁷ See in: <http://e.t.qq.com/labor2012>.

The common challenge for migrant workers is finding ways to attract media coverage for causes that are not normally in the media spotlight. This qualitative study aimed to explore the possibility of the new generation of migrant workers leveraging media as weapons of resistance in their daily struggles. The results suggest great opportunities for migrant workers to use the media to allow their voices to be read and heard, especially through ICT. However, there are some preconditions, such as ICT-affordability thresholds and in particular, China's political circumstances.

Through the use of seven semi-structured interviews and the application of a thematic analysis, various themes present three main strategies that migrant workers have applied to mediation resistance: (1) using the story as resource; (2) being in the story; and (3) compelling the media to report the story. Each of these strategies is advancing, one by one, under the framework of the mediation opportunity structure. The first strategy, using the story as resource, involves taking advantage of existing media narratives as a resource to which migrant workers can cater, for negotiating with their bosses and local authorities. This strategy is highly relevant to the current Chinese political environment and government policies. The second strategy, being in the story, requires more agency from the migrant workers by drawing support from symbolic forms, including discourse and images of symbols to create spectacles and dramas aimed at attracting mainstream media attention. Meanwhile, resistance tactics fully embody the intelligence of trade-off, which is carefully designed not to break the law and thus prevents stigmatization by the mainstream media. The third and most dramatic strategy, forcing the media to give migrant workers their voice by leveraging networked opportunity structures, is tightly linked to self-mediation: self-produced radical media has the ability to open up discursive spaces that are otherwise constrained and controlled by the mainstream media.

These findings present a unique angle for studies on migrant workers and media usage in terms of resistance. The author argues that mediation opportunity structure is a fruitful concept to encompass a wide variety of ways in which media and communication are relevant to vulnerable groups' resistance. Admittedly, this is a small sample size. Although interviews allow for greater depth of answers and insights, time commitment, practicality, and access often limit the sample size (Bryman, 2004: 333-4). Further research could benefit from reaching a wider sample. Additionally, this study only includes individuals' application of mediation resistance; however, some evidence suggests the existence of an online community of migrant workers. Through the power of media, migrant workers not only empower themselves with new spaces of articulating their own voices but also enable themselves to

exchange experiences, organize, and even mobilize conventions through new media platforms. Given the increasing level of literacy and the decreasing cost of ICT, more research is required to study aspects of online communities of migrant workers. Last but not least, the changing political climate has resulted in subtle changes to migrant workers' media visibility. With Premier Li Keqiang's recent statements that "migrant workers are not second-class citizens" and that "migrant workers deserve equal fundamental public services" and "equal rights", I suggest that wider spaces will be opened to Chinese migrant workers. More interviews on the freshest cases should be conducted under this new environment. It is my sincere hope that it will be beneficial to future research on vulnerable groups' struggles.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Topic Guide

Introducing/Initial Open-Ended Questions

Name/age/job?

Where is your hometown, and where are you working now?

How many years have you been working in your current job?

Do you watch TV programs or read newspapers about the lives, work, and stories of migrant workers?

Can you tell me the program or article that made the strongest impression on you?

How do you feel about these TV programs and newspapers? Do you believe that the stories on TV are similar to your life and represent your own voice?

Do you think it is feasible for you to articulate yourself in the media? Why or why not?

Personal Experiences of Media Usage

Do you use new media such as the Internet, QQ, Weibo, etc.?

What is the frequency with which you use new media?

What do you usually do when using these types of new media?

What do you think of new media? Is it convenient for you to use? Is it expensive for you to afford?

Have you ever used new media to organize, mobilize, or contact people to resist?

Evaluate the efficacy of new media's role in helping resistance.

Personal Experiences of Mediation resistance

Could you please tell me your story of using media, providing details?

What inspired you to resort to using the media?

Why did you choose to use the media?

There are many migrant workers who are in the same situation as you. Why do you think that the media will cover you? Is there anything special about your story that causes you believe that it may attract media attention?

What did you say to the journalist, and what did he/she reply?

In recent years, people have used many creative methods of asking for their money, such as wearing cartoon clothes among the crowds, running naked through the street—some migrant workers have even threatened their factories with suicide. What do you think of those behaviors?

How do you understand the media and government's relationship in choosing either to report or not to report a story?

Appendix 2: Interview Transcript

Audio interview with Netizen and migrant worker *Du Yi Wu Er* (Number One)

I: Hello, thank you very much for allowing me to interview you. I am a student from the London School of Economics and Political Science, working for a master's degree in MSc Global Media and Communications. Let me introduce what I am researching. I am studying the possibility that migrant workers use the media to resist in their daily struggles, including the strategies that they adapt, its mechanism, and impact. I am interested in your thoughts and attitudes. Anything you provide is very helpful to my research. This interview will be recorded, and I promise that this interview will be only used in my research work. I will start with some basic questions first. What is your job and age?

Du: I am 41 years old, and I am a construction worker.

I: Where is your hometown, and where are you working now?

Du: I am from Jiangsu, and I am now working for a factory in Taicang Development Zone.

I: How many years have you been working as a construction worker?

Du: I left my hometown when was 20, eh... and I have worked for nearly 20 years.

I: Have you ever asked your manager for back wages during your 20 years in the workforce?

Du: Yes, I have.

I: Can you tell me details about what happened? How much money did they owe you?

Du: (Hesitate for a while) Wait... what do you want to know about that? Will anything change if I tell you?

I: I am a graduate student in the Media and Communication Department, as I told you on Weibo. Although I may not help you solve your arrearages problem immediately because of my own limited ability, there are thousands of migrant workers who are suffering from waiting for back pay just like you. I hope that you can tell me your story and that your experience will gain its value by becoming part of our data and being read by more people. Therefore, your help will be very significant in the long term.

Du: You are a journalist?

I: I study journalist, but I haven't worked yet.

I: Are you owed a large amount of back wages?

Du: There's no reason to have an interview if you are not a journalist. Can you solve my problem? What you make me feel is that you just watch the scene like many college students do. Never will you know the desperation and hardship of asking for money back!

I: No, of course not. I understand your feelings, but I really want to do something for you, and that's why I contacted you. You are my interviewee, and I picked you as representative of migrant workers. Your words can partially explain the life of contemporary Chinese migrant workers. Moreover, it can also help other migrant workers. Now you can see how significant and valuable this interview is, and you have previously agreed to be interviewed. I promise that our conversation will be anonymous and confidential. If you have any other concerns, please tell me about them.

Du: What you want me to say?

I: How much money did they owe you last time? Have you asked for your money back? Tell me some details about that.

Du: The manager owed me more than 4000 RMB, which he finally returned to me. However, can you imagine that I hustled for that money for nearly a year! (Gives a sigh of relief.) Sometimes I think arrears money is an addiction for those conscienceless managers: the only thing they know is how to deprive us. By now, the new manager owes me money again, and I need to go to Shanghai for money next week. I hope I have good luck.

I: The 4000 RMB is your last year's wage: how did you get it back? Did you ask the manager for your money?

Du: There's no point in asking the manager! The only thing they do is to deprive you! I have worked on construction site for three months without a penny. The government departments, like administration committee of the development zone and the labor inspection department, told me to negotiate with my manager. The New Year is coming but there was nothing I could do. I have a sick mother lying in bed, and my wife and son are waiting for me. My son needs money to go to school, and my mother needs money to see a doctor. How can I go back empty-handed? Helplessly, I went on the street holding a banner. At the time, I could not figure out anything else that I could.

I: Can you describe the banner to me? Its content, the color of the words, the size of the banner, etc.

Du: I wrote 'Return Us Our Blood and Sweat Money! Can someone help me?' on my banner. The words were painted in black with 'Blood and Sweat' in red to make it more appealing (to passersby and the media).

I: Where did you hold the banner? What was the reaction of passersby?

Du: I knelt down with the banner on the crossroad of business street behind our (working factory in a) development zone. People stopped to read because they were curious about what I wrote on the banner. That's not something to honor.

I: Why you chose a business street? Who did you wish to see the banner?

Du: I chose that location primarily because there are many people on the business street, the more people see my banner, the higher the possibility of success. Moreover, the street is just a ten-minute walk from the Taicang government offices. If I continue to kneel here, someone has to take responsibility for me.

I: What made you think of using a banner to ask for your money back?

Du: I just imitated what people always do on TV programs. I believe that if I can appear on a TV show, I will be famous too. I will not have to worry about my wage after becoming famous.

I: So you thought about attracting media attention by holding the banner?

Du: Yes, I did. My wife said if that my story was to be exposed by the media, my wage would be paid for sure. However, where can I find journalists? I thought that perhaps a banner would attract journalists and that after they report my story, everything will be solved. I don't know when the journalists will come, but what I do know is that on a street with more people, I have a better chance of encountering a journalist.

I: Aren't you afraid of the risk of holding a banner? The police may consider you to be disturbing the social order. Even passersby may take you to be a performer.

Du: Actually, I thought about that question before I acted. You know, people like us need strategy to obtain our wages back. If I wait without doing anything, no one will give my money to me. In addition, I have only held a banner, not broken the law. The police have no reason to arrest me. I wrote my story on the banner. Good-hearted people could help me. Otherwise, I have done nothing to them. I didn't disturb anybody.

I: So from your perspective, holding a banner in the crowd is a relatively gentle and moderate way that is both safe and attractive to the media, can I understand your words that way?

Du: Yes, I do hope that journalists and the government can help me ask for my back wages. I cannot count on my manager any more. If you decide to be a troublemaker, then be a big troublemaker!

I: Have you recently heard of creative ways to claim back wages, like someone asking for money naked, someone wearing Donald Duck clothes to ask, or even someone threatening managers by jumping from buildings? What do think of that behavior?

Du: Your citizens may take we migrant workers as inferior people without dignity, but who wants to exhaust their last breath for only a small wage if they are not in a deep desperation? The media need ratings. If I don't try something new, they won't even notice me. They won't notice us unless we do something abnormal and surprising. However, regarding what you said about jumping from buildings or something like that, I think those protesters were crossing the line. To me, I will never act like that.

I: In the end, how did you obtain your back wages?

Du: A police car passed by and saw it. The police stopped and asked what had happened, and then everything was solved. I met a very good policeman.

I: In general, do you think it is good for migrant workers to use the media to solve their problems?

Du: Yes, I think so. I am too powerless to ask for my wages, but journalists have the power to help me through their coverage. When the coverage comes out, more people can read my story, and the conscienceless manager will be blamed. Then, I will receive my money. The next time, I will again use a banner to help me ask for my money in the hope of meeting warmhearted journalists.

I: I have some final questions about surfing the Internet. I notice that you often use Tengxun Weibo, and I would like to ask how much time you spend on the Internet everyday.

Du: About two hours. Sometimes longer, sometimes shorter, it depends. However, I don't log in to my Weibo every day. Every two days on average, I guess.

I: Do you use a computer or a mobile phone to surf the Internet?

Du: I use mobile phone. I have a monthly mobile-phone package. I can use my mobile phone to see what I need.

I: Mobile phones are inexpensive, aren't they?

Du: It is not expensive. Mine is a Samsung, and it cost approximately 700RMB. Moreover, it can surf the Internet, which is very convenient for me.

I: Is it difficult for you to afford a computer?

Du: Yes, a computer is a luxury that I cannot afford. Luckily, I have my mobile phone: I can do a lot of things that computer does with my mobile phone.

I: Do you prefer to read or to watch things on your mobile phone?

Du: I use QQ to contact my family and friends. I like reading novels after work, and sometimes I read news on my mobile phone.

I: What do you think of the QQ and Weibo platform? Is it convenient for you to use?

Du: It is very convenient. I prefer sending QQ messages over SMS, because sending QQ messages costs me nothing. I can chat with my son and my friends.

I: What about Weibo? How did you discover Weibo?

Du: Many of my friends use Weibo, I just followed them to have a try. I am really interested in Weibo. I can listen to others and others can listen to me. We send messages through Weibo, some people retweet what I tweet, and some people comment on what I have said.

I: Have you ever used new media such as QQ and Weibo to organize, mobilize, or contact people to resist?

Du: We have had some face-to-face discussions about holding banners on the street. Mostly, we use mobile phones to contact each other. QQ is a tool for me to contact my family, and Weibo is for fun, you know, to read novels, news and so on.

I: Thank you for your time! I am so glad to have conducted this interview. Your comments are of great significance to my research! Do you have anything to add? Or do you any questions for me?

Du: I have no questions.

I: Your help is appreciated. I promise that your comments will only be used in my study. I hope that everything will be ok for you to get your back wages in Shanghai in a few days.

Du: Thank you. I hope so.

I: I guess that's it. Thank you again for your help! I wish you a good day! Goodbye.

Du: Goodbye.

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