

DOCTORAL THESIS

Power and the Imaginary: Discursive Construction of GBA as a Working Place for Hong Kong and Macau Residents and their Occupational Identity Issue

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have increasingly focused on the impact of media representation on constructing dominant ideological frameworks in the digital era. However, little research has explored how to systematically create interactive impacts between online and offline place discourses, particularly in the academic circle. Furthermore, media representation studies rarely examine the consistency of top-down designed frameworks with the discursive discourse of the "bottom", and the impact of macro-environmental change on occupational identity construction.

To address these gaps, this thesis investigates the media representation of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA) initiative as both a geographical and symbolic concept. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model for critical discourse analysis and a conceptual framework consisting of power and imagination theories, the thesis examines the media data of the GBA. To explore the alignment between top-down media frameworks and bottom-up discourses, as well as to understand how macro-environmental changes influence occupational identity construction, the study conducts semi-structured interviews with residents from Hong Kong and Macao, the two special administrative regions (SARs). Through these interviews, the working experiences and impressions of the participants in the Guangdong GBA are thoroughly examined.

The findings suggest that by aligning grassroots interests with those of the authorities and blending media communication with real-world actions, the Chinese government has created dominant ideological frameworks in the digital era. Unlike previous successful ideological movements, this framework emphasizes individual aspirations, while portraying the Chinese government as a facilitator in helping people achieve their goals through humane and evidence-based means. The discourse rebrands complex historical issues with current achievements and future-oriented ideas, such as "GBA as a world bay area," to legitimize regional expectations and build public confidence. Additionally, the discourses connect the initiative with urban prosperity, while creating new discourse related to regional development.

The interview portion of the study identifies four typical professional identities among the residents from the two SARs in the Guangdong part of the GBA. These identities are actually affected by the dynamic place discourse constructed by residents themselves.

This thesis extends media discourse research by providing the authority framework for media representation studies of new places, incorporating the imagination theory, and analyzing online and offline community interactions. The study proposes a combination of top-down and bottom-up research designs to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study and contributes to the occupational identity study by providing empirical evidence on the impact of the macro environment. Additionally, the study sheds light on the importance of place discourses in regional development initiatives and offers practical insights into labor movement issues in the GBA, thereby contributing to the promotion of social and political stability. Finally, the study contributes to the literature on media

representation studies in regional integration and offers implications for other mega city-regions' integration strategies in response to global challenges.