

China

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INTRODUCTION

As of 2025, China remains one of the world's most geopolitically significant nations, operating under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Politically centralized yet increasingly technocratic, the government has sought to balance national security with continued economic modernization. Economically, China has faced slowing growth, particularly in the real estate and manufacturing sectors, alongside rising youth unemployment and demographic challenges. However, strategic investments in the digital economy, green energy, and Belt and Road projects continue to sustain global influence.

Journalism in China has historically operated under state oversight, shaped by Marxist-Leninist principles of media as a tool for social harmony and political education. Since the market reforms of the 1980s, commercial media grew under a controlled pluralism, creating space for investigative journalism within official bounds.

The fieldwork of this study took place throughout the year of 2023, during which China's journalistic landscape evolved rapidly. The continuous rise of digital platforms has introduced complex new dynamics, with "self-media" and AI-generated content adding richness and challenges to the information ecosystem.

BACKGROUNDS OF JOURNALISTS

The surveyed journalists in China were predominantly female (59.1%) with 40.9% male. Their average age was approximately 35.9 years (SD = 8.8), with a median age of 35. They are highly educated: 77.3% hold a Bachelor's degree or equivalent, while 21.8% have obtained a Master's degree or equivalent. A vast majority (98.2%) received formal education or professional training in journalism, mostly through universities or colleges (60.2%), followed by journalism apprenticeships or cadetships (29.7%) and short-term courses (10.1%).

JOURNALISTS IN THE NEWSROOM

The majority of surveyed Chinese journalists worked in traditional, state-run media organizations: 53% for newspapers, 34.1% for television, and 10.6% for radio. Very few worked for magazines (0.2%) or internet-native platforms (0.3%). Notably, 1.8% indicated they did not have a main employer. In terms of geographical scope, 32.8% worked for local media, while 67.2% were based in regional or central outlets. All respondents reported working in state-run media organizations.

Employment conditions were relatively stable but heavily institutionalized. Most journalists were formally employed: 45% on permanent contracts and 51.6% on temporary contracts. Only 1.6% were part-time employees, and just 0.3% worked as freelancers or are self-employed. On average, Chinese journalists had accumulated 11.8 years of professional experience (SD = 8.7; Median = 10). A total of 27.6% of journalists were assigned to specific beats or subject areas, such as politics, society, or business. However, the majority continued to work on general assignment, often covering a variety of topics based on editorial needs.

Professional affiliation remained low: only 18.8% of respondents were members of professional associations. This may reflect both the top-down nature of media governance and limited bottom-up professional mobilization. Financially, 12.9% reported earning income from sources outside journalism, which could include teaching, consulting, or online content creation. Full-time journalists reported an average working week of 45.1 hours (SD = 11.0; Median = 45), indicating a relatively high workload typical of media systems with strong output demands and time-sensitive production cycles.

SAFETY AND WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

Chinese journalists expressed significant concern over work-related well-being (see Table 1). 66.8% of the respondents were strongly concerned about their physical well-being and 64.3% about emotional and mental well-being. 21.7% expressed strong worry about losing their journalism job within the next 12 months.

TABLE 1. WORK-RELATED CONCERNS

	N	Agree/ strongly agree	Mean	SD
Worried about losing job in journalism within the next 12 months	1146	21.7%	2.78	1.03
Concerned about physical well-being	1158	66.8%	3.84	0.93
Concerned about emotional and mental wellbeing	1158	64.3%	3.77	0.98

Question: "Thinking about your work, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

JOURNALISTIC ROLES

Chinese journalists strongly supported instrumental and interpretative roles. Over 88% found it very or extremely important to support national development and government policy, while 85.9% favored conveying a positive image of political leaders. Providing analysis (65.7%), raising public awareness (64.5%), and promoting peace and health (over 90%) were also widely endorsed roles.

TABLE 2. JOURNALISTIC ROLES

	N	Very/extremely important	Mean	SD
Be a detached observer	1130	49.2%	3.43	1.03
Monitor and scrutinize those in power	1105	32.9%	2.93	1.19
Shine a light on society's problems	1145	64.5%	3.76	0.92
Motivate people to participate in politics	1119	28.9%	2.81	1.14
Provide analysis of current affairs	1151	65.7%	3.78	0.94
Let people express their views	1145	61.8%	3.70	0.96
Provide information people need to form political opinion	1123	48.0%	3.35	1.09
Advocate for social change	1103	37.6%	3.07	1.16
Influence public opinion	1123	57.0%	3.59	1.02
Set the political agenda	1085	29.1%	2.76	1.21
Promote peace and tolerance	1138	65.9%	3.83	1.03
Educate the audience	1140	53.9%	3.55	1.07
Point toward possible solutions to society's problems	1140	64.9%	3.80	0.99
Speak on behalf of the marginalized	1142	59.0%	3.68	1.03
Support national development	1163	88.4%	4.41	0.80
Support government policy	1162	88.4%	4.40	0.75
Convey a positive image of political leaders	1155	85.9%	4.38	0.85
Provide entertainment and relaxation	1155	29.8%	3.01	1.06
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	1159	65.9%	3.84	0.97
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	1163	70.1%	3.89	0.87
Tell stories that emotionally move the audience	1162	67.6%	3.86	0.91
Support efforts to protect public health	1162	72.7%	4.00	0.89
Counteract disinformation	1165	90.1%	4.50	0.72

Question: "Please tell me how important it is to do each of the following in your daily work." (Scale: 5 = Extremely important; 4 = Very important; 3 = Moderately important; 2 = Slightly important; 1 = Not at all important.)

JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

Epistemologically, most Chinese journalists agreed that interpretation is essential to make sense of facts (74.8%) and that objective reality can be represented in reporting (75.2%). However, nearly half (48.5%) believed that truth is shaped by those in power. About one-third (32.6%) thought journalists cannot fully separate personal beliefs from reporting, indicating moderate epistemic relativism.

TABLE 3. JOURNALISTIC EPISTEMOLOGIES

	N	Agree/strongly agree	Mean	SD
Interpretation is necessary to make sense of facts	1146	74.8%	3.87	0.77
Truth is inevitably shaped by those in power	1122	48.5%	3.37	0.97
It is impossible for journalists to withhold their personal beliefs from reporting	1117	32.6%	3.08	0.94
Things are either true or false, there is no in-between	1146	20.9%	2.60	1.05
It is possible to represent objective reality in reporting	1141	75.2%	3.87	0.78

Questions: "The following statements deal with beliefs related to how journalists know what they know. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree." / "Using the same scale, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following beliefs." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

JOURNALISTIC ETHICS

Ethical standards were viewed rigidly: 93.4% of respondents believed journalism ethics should always be determined by professional codes. Only 11% considered ethics a matter of personal judgment. In practice, controversial methods such as claiming false identity (19.1% always justified, 70.9% justified on occasion) or hidden recording (9.1%, 75.9%) received high conditional acceptance. Use of unverified content or accepting money was widely rejected (see Table 5).

TABLE 4. ETHICAL ORIENTATIONS

	N	Agree/strongly agree	Mean	SD
What is ethical for journalists should always be determined by professional standards regardless of situation and personal judgment	1165	93.4%	4.47	0.75
What is ethical for journalists should be determined by professional standards unless extraordinary circumstances require disregarding them	1162	15.6%	2.26	1.07
What is ethical for journalists should depend on each specific situation	1164	21.9%	2.48	1.10
What is ethical for journalists should be a matter of personal judgment	1163	11.0%	2.20	0.96

Question: "The following statements describe different responses journalists may have to ethical problems. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree." (Scale: 5 = Strongly agree; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree.)

TABLE 5. JUSTIFICATION OF CONTROVERSIAL REPORTING METHODS

	N	Always justified	Justified on occasion
Claiming to be somebody else	1142	19.1%	70.9%
Using hidden recording devices	1132	9.1%	75.9%
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	1119	0.7%	13.7%
Using the personal materials of powerful people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	1071	1.8%	23.2%
Using the personal materials of ordinary people, such as documents and photos, without their permission	1123	0.5%	19.7%
Paying people for confidential information	1105	6.2%	46.5%
Accepting money from sources	1109	1.2%	9.6%
Accepting a free product or service from sources	1103	1.9%	25.7%
Producing content that mimics news stories but hides its promotional nature	1101	1.7%	31.4%
Publishing or broadcasting stories with information that is not yet verified	1132	0.4%	5.7%

Question: "Which of the following, if any, do you think may be always justified, or justified on occasion, and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?"

EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

15.4% reported a great deal or complete freedom in choosing news stories, and 18.9% in emphasizing aspects of coverage.

TABLE 6. PERCEPTIONS OF EDITORIAL AUTONOMY AND MEDIA FREEDOM

	N	A great deal/ complete freedom	Mean	SD
Freedom in selecting the news stories	1151	15.4%	3.02	0.59
Freedom in deciding which aspects of a story should be emphasized	1148	18.9%	3.11	0.55

(Scale: 5 = Complete freedom; 4 = A great deal of freedom; 3 = Some freedom; 2 = Little freedom; 1 = No freedom at all.)

EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

The most influential factors on editorial decisions included journalism ethics (69.1%), editorial supervisors (69.9%), business managers (66.7%), censorship (63.1%), and personal beliefs (64.9%). External pressures from government officials (44.5%) and media regulation (60.8%) were also prominent. Peers, audience feedback, and competing organizations exerted relatively lower influence.

TABLE 7. EDITORIAL INFLUENCES

	N	Very/extremely influential	Mean	SD
Peers on the news staff	1149	19.9%	2.81	1.00
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	1160	70.2%	3.86	0.85
The business managers of the news organization	1137	67.3%	3.88	0.95
The owners of the news organization	1012	35.6%	3.06	1.16
Editorial policy	1135	55.9%	3.63	0.91
Advertising considerations	1119	28.7%	3.03	1.04
Profit expectations	1122	36.6%	3.18	1.09
Audience research and data	1150	55.3%	3.64	0.95
Availability of news-gathering resources	1143	58.4%	3.68	0.88
Time limits	1140	41.2%	3.37	0.90
Journalism ethics	1146	69.6%	3.95	0.98
Self-censorship	1145	61.9%	3.75	0.98
Personal values and beliefs	1143	65.5%	3.81	1.01
Colleagues in other media	1145	8.8%	2.58	0.83
Friends, acquaintances and family	1132	6.5%	2.29	0.88
Feedback from the audience	1156	41.7%	3.38	0.80
Competing news organizations	1157	30.1%	3.11	0.86
Media laws and regulation	1154	61.0%	3.73	0.99
Access to information	1150	58.3%	3.69	0.86
Government censorship	1148	63.2%	3.76	0.95
Government officials	1129	44.8%	3.38	1.03
Politicians	1094	36.8%	3.17	1.10
Business people	1089	14.7%	2.64	0.95
Public relations	1107	26.4%	2.99	0.93
Relationships with news sources	1130	39.7%	3.34	0.94
Police	1100	24.8%	2.86	1.06
Issue advocacy groups	1078	8.0%	2.32	0.93
Scientists or health experts	1105	28.2%	3.00	1.03

Question: "Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work as a journalist." (Scale: 5 = Extremely influential; 4 = Very influential; 3 = Moderately influential; 2 = Slightly influential; 1 = Not at all influential.)