



Country Report

Journalists in China

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18 October, 2016

Backgrounds of Journalists

The typical journalist in China is male or female, in his or her early-thirties and holds a university degree in fields of journalism or communication. Of the 646 interviewed journalists who have answered the question of gender, 326 were women, making a proportion of 50.5 percent of the overall sample. On average, Chinese journalists were 33.90 years old ($s=7.17$); 53.4 percent of the journalists were younger than 34 years. Journalists tend to be well educated: 77.2 percent of the respondents held a college or bachelor degree, 21.9 percent held degree from a graduate program, and 0.5 percent of the journalists obtained a doctoral degree. Of those respondents who held a university degree, a majority (76.5%) had specialized in communication or journalism. Across the whole sample of Chinese journalists, 45.2 percent had specialized in journalism, 23.7 percent had studied in other communication field, and 7.6 percent had specialized in both journalism and another communication field.

Journalists in the Newsroom

The majority of journalists interviewed in China held a full-time position (98.5%), whereas 1.2 percent of the respondents indicated that they had part-time employments, and 0.3 percent worked as freelance journalist. Chinese journalists are fairly experienced. On average, they had worked as journalists for 9.01 years ($s=6.37$). Among all interviewed Chinese journalists, those who had worked between 5 to 10 years took the largest part (38.8%), with the more experienced (more than 10 years) a 31.7 percent and the less experienced (less than 5 years) a 29.5 percent. A slight majority of the interviewed journalists worked on various topics and subjects (55.2%). The remaining 44.8 percent of the respondents indicated that they worked on a specific desk, such as politics, local news, or sports.

On the whole, Chinese journalists worked for 1.02 newsrooms ($s=0.15$); 8.3 percent of them had additional jobs outside the area of journalism. A minority of the interviewed journalists were members of a professional association (14.5%). The majority of Chinese journalists in the sample worked for traditional media: 38.7 percent contributed to television, 21.3 percent to radio, and 33.0 percent to daily newspaper. The left 7.1 percent worked for online outlet (of offline outlet). There are no journalists in the sample reported they worked for news agency, for online outlet(stand-alone), for magazine and for weekly newspaper.

Journalistic Roles

With regards to professional role orientations, Chinese journalists found it most important to report things as they are, to provide analysis of current affairs, to support national development, to provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life, and to be a detached observer (see Table 1).

The relevance of these “classic” roles such as “to report things as they are” and “to provide analysis of current affairs” was fairly undisputed among the interviewed journalists as the relatively low standard deviations indicate. Likewise, there was a strong consensus among the respondents over the importance of supporting national development. Still, a majority of journalists in China found it important to provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience, to let people express their views, to influence public opinion, and to support government policy.

The most disputative role is to be an adversary of the government ($s=1.32$), which is also the least supportive role. Another highly disputative role is to convey a positive image of political leadership ($s=1.16$). Except for the roles of supporting national development and supporting government policy, other politically more assertive roles were not widely supported, such as setting the political agenda, motivating people to participate in political activity, and monitoring and scrutinizing political leaders.

Table 1: Roles of journalists

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very important”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Report things as they are	642	83.8	4.10	.75
Provide analysis of current affairs	640	70.8	3.84	.88
Support national development	639	68.7	3.90	.93
Provide advice, orientation and direction for daily life	639	66.4	3.77	.84
Be a detached observer	637	64.4	3.70	.93
Provide the kind of news that attracts the largest audience	641	62.4	3.70	.95
Let people express their views	642	59.8	3.66	1.00
Influence public opinion	641	58.2	3.58	.94
Support government policy	642	53.3	3.54	1.00
Convey a positive image of political leadership	644	48.8	3.40	1.16
Provide information people need to make political decisions	642	46.3	3.35	1.02
Advocate for social change	637	45.2	3.32	1.04
Monitor and scrutinize political leaders	637	40.7	3.14	1.11
Monitor and scrutinize business	637	40.5	3.19	1.03
Provide entertainment and relaxation	634	38.6	3.17	1.05
Motivate people to participate in political activity	639	34.1	3.05	1.09
Set the political agenda	635	29.0	2.77	1.14
Be an adversary of the government	629	25.0	2.44	1.32

Question: Please tell me how important each of these things is in your work. 5 means you find them extremely important, 4 means very important, 3 means somewhat important, 2 means little importance, and 1 means unimportant.

Professional Ethics

Chinese journalists generally demonstrated a strong commitment to professional standards of ethics. The respondents almost unanimously agreed that journalists should always adhere to the codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context (see Table 2). Furthermore, nearly nine out of ten journalists disagreed with the view their ethical decisions are a matter of personal judgment, and around four out of five journalists disagreed with the view sometimes it is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it. However, one out of three journalists of the interviewees subscribed to the idea that journalists’ ethical decisions depend on the specific situation.

The picture was mixed with regards to a selected number of potentially controversial reporting techniques. A large majority of journalists in China found using hidden microphones or cameras as well as claiming to be somebody else justifiable at least on occasion (see Table 3). Still, most journalists thought it was

acceptable to use re-creations or dramatizations of news by actor, to pay people for confidential information, and to get employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information. Only a minority of journalists found it permissible to accept money from sources, to alter or fabricate quotes from sources, and to make use of personal documents (such as letters and pictures) without permission.

Table 2: Ethical orientations of journalists

	N	Percentage saying "strongly" and "somewhat agree"	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalists should always adhere to codes of professional ethics, regardless of situation and context	648	91.8	4.51	.71
What is ethical in journalism depends on the specific situation	644	33.9	2.82	1.17
It is acceptable to set aside moral standards if extraordinary circumstances require it	644	23.6	2.55	1.08
What is ethical in journalism is a matter of personal judgment	644	13.8	2.31	.94

Question: The following statements describe different approaches to journalism. For each of them, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree. 5 means you strongly agree, 4 means somewhat agree, 3 means undecided, 2 means somewhat disagree, and 1 means strongly disagree.

Table 3: Justification of controversial reporting methods by journalists

	N	Percentage saying "always justified"	Percentage saying "justified on occasion"
Paying people for confidential information	641	31.4	50.5
Using re-creations or dramatizations of news by actors	635	20.9	62.0
Claiming to be somebody else	642	20.7	65.6
Using hidden microphones or cameras	640	8.3	73.0
Getting employed in a firm or organization to gain inside information	635	4.4	49.8
Exerting pressure on unwilling informants to get a story	637	3.9	44.0
Using confidential business or government documents without authorization	638	2.4	35.7
Publishing stories with unverified content	643	2.3	15.4
Altering photographs	640	2.2	26.1
Accepting money from sources	638	1.6	17.2
Altering or fabricating quotes from sources	643	1.4	11.5
Making use of personal documents such as letters and pictures without permission	640	1.3	26.3

Question: Given an important story, which of the following, if any, do you think may be justified on occasion and which would you not approve of under any circumstances?

Professional Autonomy and Influences

Journalists in China reported a limited degree of professional autonomy. Although the majority respondents (68.4%) said that they had some freedom in their selection of stories, 15.0 percent said they had little freedom or no freedom at all. In terms of deciding over what aspects to emphasize in a news story, 30.3 percent said they had complete or a great deal of freedom, compared with 54.9 percent who said they had some freedom and 14.8 percent said they had little freedom or no freedom at all. Still a minority of journalists reported that they participated in editorial coordination activities (such as meetings and news management) "always" or "very often" (30.9%).

News production is influenced by a variety of factors. Among the potential sources of influences mentioned in the interview, "journalism ethics" fared on top of the list among Chinese respondents (see Table 4). A majority of journalists found their work substantively constrained by censorship, by managers of the news organization, and by editorial supervisors and higher editors. Overall, constraints of newsroom

hierarchy and macro external environment were found to be relatively influential, like censorship, managers of the news organization, editorial supervisors, editorial policy, and media laws and regulation. Also, more than half of the respondents admitted their work was influenced by information access (or lack thereof), by their personal values and beliefs, and by the availability (or non-availability) of news-gathering resources. Chinese journalists felt little influenced by sources from within civic realm: pressure groups, business people, and public relations. They also reported only minor influence from friends, acquaintances and family as well as from colleagues in other media. Likewise, economic influences – stemming from owners, market competition and profit expectations as well as advertising – seem to have little relevance in Chinese newsrooms.

Table 4: Perceived influences

	N	Percentage saying “extremely” and “very influential”	Mean	Standard Deviation
Journalism ethics	648	68.7	3.88	0.91
Censorship	649	61.5	3.74	0.89
Managers of the news organization	647	60.1	3.7	0.89
Editorial supervisors and higher editors	650	58.5	3.67	0.83
Your personal values and beliefs	636	58.0	3.68	0.95
Editorial policy	650	57.4	3.64	0.89
Information access	647	57.0	3.6	0.81
Media laws and regulation	647	54.7	3.57	0.86
Availability of news-gathering resources	647	52.2	3.54	0.88
Government officials	646	42.4	3.34	0.98
Time limits	645	40.5	3.35	0.86
Politicians	639	39.0	3.22	1.06
Feedback from the audience	648	38.6	3.31	0.82
Owners of the news organization	633	35.5	3.18	1.04
Audience research and data	644	35.4	3.19	0.93
Relationships with news sources	386	35.0	3.18	0.93
Competing news organizations	646	32.5	3.1	0.88
Advertising considerations	643	27.2	3.06	0.97
Profit expectations	644	27.2	3.04	0.98
Public relations	639	19.9	2.84	0.88
Your peers on the staff	639	18.8	2.93	0.84
Friends, acquaintances and family	623	13.3	2.51	0.97
Business people	636	12.9	2.54	0.89
Colleagues in other media	638	11.9	2.66	0.86
Pressure groups	635	11.0	2.51	0.87

Question: Here is a list of potential sources of influence. Please tell me how much influence each of the following has on your work. 5 means it is extremely influential, 4 means very influential, 3 means somewhat influential, 2 means little influential, and 1 means not influential.

Journalism in Transition

Journalism is currently in a state of change. According to Chinese journalists, except that the increase of the relevance of journalism for society is relatively unanimous, other changes are notably disputable. This can be proven by the similar proportion of the increase and its corresponding decrease, such as the use of search engines, average working hours, technical skills, the interaction with the audiences, etc. This reflects a wide differentiation in Chinese journalists’ working environment, practices, and perceived changes. Although, there is a common concern of Chinese journalists for the decrease in journalists’ freedom to make editorial decision.

Influences on journalism and news production have changed as well. All influences on journalists have increased for all sources mentioned in Table 6. Here, it was

especially the influence of social media, audience involvement in news production, user-generated contents, and audience feedback that had strengthened the most during the past five years. A majority of Chinese journalists reported an increase for market-related influences – such as competition, profit making pressures, advertising considerations, audience research, and a pressure toward sensational news – as well as for audience feedback.

The questions about changes in journalism were only presented to journalists who had five years or more of professional experience.

Table 5: Changes in journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "increased"	Percentage saying has "decreased"
The use of search engines	442	51.1	42.5
The relevance of journalism for society	441	47.8	25.4
Average working hours of journalists	443	45.4	37.5
Technical skills	443	44.9	41.5
Interactions of journalists with their audiences	444	42.3	39.9
Time available for researching stories	443	40.0	37.2
Journalists' freedom to make editorial decisions	444	32.2	38.3
The credibility of journalism	442	31.0	31.7
Having a university degree	444	27.9	28.2
Having a degree in journalism or a related field	444	26.4	33.8

Question: Please tell me whether you think there has been an increase or a decrease in the importance of following aspects of work in China. 5 means they have increased a lot, 4 means they have somewhat increased, 3 means there has been no change, 2 means they have somewhat decreased, and 1 means they have decreased a lot.

Table 6: Changes in influences on journalism

	N	Percentage saying has "strengthened"	Percentage saying has "weakened"
Social media, such as Facebook and Twitter	444	85.8	4.1
Audience involvement in news production	444	83.3	3.6
User-generated contents, such as blogs	447	81.9	3.4
Audience feedback	443	76.5	5.4
Competition	446	71.3	7.2
Profit making pressures	447	70.0	4.7
Advertising considerations	448	65.4	6.3
Public relations	445	58.7	3.8
Audience research	445	56.4	7.6
Pressure toward sensational news	442	53.6	11.8
Journalism education	445	44.0	28.8
Ethical standards	447	43.2	24.4

Question: Please tell me to what extent these influences have become stronger or weaker during the past five years in China. 5 means they have strengthened a lot, 4 means they have somewhat strengthened, 3 means they did not change, 2 means they have somewhat weakened, and 1 means they have weakened a lot.

Methodological Information

<i>Size of the population:</i>	258,000 working journalists (estimated)
<i>Sampling method:</i>	purposive quota sampling for newsrooms and simply systematic sampling for journalists within newsrooms
<i>Sample size:</i>	652 working journalists
<i>Interview methods:</i>	mail (print) and face-to-face (broadcast)
<i>Response rate:</i>	64% (print) and 72% (broadcast)
<i>Period of field research:</i>	11/2012-01/2013 (print) and 11/2015-01/2016 (broadcast)