

Perceptions and attitudes of Chinese journalists about gender equality: A national survey

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Abstract

This study provides a contemporary portrait of Chinese journalists' perceptions and attitudes about gender equality, including their perceptions and attitudes about gender/equality and the status of gender equality in China; attitudes about media and professional practices; journalists' preference for news; journalists' ideas about the influence of media content on audiences; the role of journalism in gender equality; gender-related training among journalists; and professional practices in representing gender and disseminating the ideas of gender equality. The survey shows that 83.2% of the respondents believe media can play an important role in promoting gender equality. Journalists' perceptions and attitudes about gender equality are influenced by intertwining factors such as gender, professional practices, and the society. Given the likely bearing of these ideas and attitudes on their reporting, additional efforts are necessary to improve journalists' gender/equality awareness and to disseminate the ideas of gender equality in the media in China.

Keywords

Attitude, China, gender, gender equality, journalists, perception

Introduction

Gender equality is a principle protected by the Chinese constitution and by more than 40 laws and regulations concerning the protection of women's rights.¹ Article 96 of the 1954 Constitution stipulates, "Women in the People's Republic of China enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of political, economic, cultural, social and family life." At the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, Chinese President Jiang Zemin reiterated that gender equality "is a basic state policy for promoting social development." The *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of*

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Women's Rights and Interests, adopted by the National People's Congress in 1999, was designed to "protect women's lawful rights and interests, promote the equality between men and women and allow full to women's role in socialist modernization."²

The role of communications media in people's life has been being a focus in communication studies. The mass-produced messages are claimed to form "a common culture through which communities cultivated shared and public notions about facts, values, and contingencies of human existence" (Gerbner, 1969, p. 123). More to the point, communications media are "pervasive and powerful influences on how people view men and women" (Wood, 1994, p. 32). As the *Platform for Action* passed at the 1995 World Conference on Women pointed out, "Everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women." As such, media can help promote gender equality. Indeed, as will be discussed below, 83.2% of the journalists surveyed for this research believe media can play an important role in promoting gender equality.

Media production involves "the complex interaction of institutional structures, organizational/corporate constraints, the basis of financing and the possibility of advertiser pressure, the regulatory context, as well as the predispositions of individual workers and owners" (Carter & Steiner, 2008, p. 16). The individual workers, that is, journalists, are the first gate-keepers in the process of determining what news stories are published or broadcast. In gatekeeping theory, both the early research, which focused on the decisions of journalists (e.g. Snider, 1967; White, 1950), and the subsequent research, which explored other levels of forces such as professional routines of journalists and the influence of the news organization studies (Ettema & Whitney, 1987), emphasized the importance of journalists. Many transnational or comparative reports (e.g. Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015; International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), 2011) and research have applied a gender or feminist perspective to studies of, among other topics, the history of women in the news media, the gendered structure and the gender culture of the newsroom, and the women leadership in the news media (e.g. Carter, Branston, & Allen, 1998; Chambers, Steiner, & Fleming, 2004; de Bruin & Ross, 2004).

In China, there has been increase research in journalists from a gender perspective since the 1995 World Conference on Women. Between 1995 and 2004, the 16 core Chinese-language journalism and communication studies journals carried 137 articles probing women journalists/communicators, accounting for 49.1% of the articles in media and gender/women studies. And "most of the literature are about how women journalists played a role during China's revolution or the reform and opening-up" or "their working experience in news media" (Bu, 2006, p. 82, *my translation*).

Although women journalists' gender advantages in journalism have been explored (e.g. Song, 2003; Wu, 2000), some scholars also noted the challenges and problems facing women journalists, such as the dilemma (Liu, 2003) and psychological pressure (Zhong, 2012) in career advancement. And Zhang and Shi (2008) noted the marginalization of women journalists beneath women's increasing participation in journalism, as well as media's commercial utilization of women journalists in market competition.

And there are a few surveys concerning the status of women journalists in news media in China. The first and only national survey of Chinese journalists from a gender perspective, carried out from April 1994 to June 1995, revealed problems such as women's lack of opportunities for promotion and women's low representation in leadership positions (Chen & Bu, 1996).

Since then, a few regional surveys have explored the situation of women journalists in China. For example, in comparing survey findings about women journalists in Shanghai with the 1995 national survey, Jia (2001) pointed out that in 2001, women journalists already held "half of the

sky” in Shanghai with high degree of satisfaction with their work; but they lacked fair access to management positions, awards, and so on. Similarly, the survey organized by Women Journalists Working Committee of Shanghai Journalists Association (2014) found women journalists facing a “glass ceiling” and pointed out that the family and marriage pressures are major obstacles to women journalists’ careers. Luo’s (2010) survey of women sports journalists in Shanghai found that although 49.1% of the respondents said there was no gender discrimination in their workplace, they did face a “glass ceiling”: Less than 4% of them worked in administrative positions. And Fen’s (2010) survey of the journalists in Guangzhou in 2005 found the female-to-male ratio was 0.28 among managing editors and 0.23 among executive editors.

And Shen’s (2002) survey of the journalists in Nanjing examined journalists’ gender conceptions and their “behavior orientations” influenced by different degrees of gender conceptions. On the whole, little research looks at journalists (of both genders) on the national level from a gender perspective and less scholarly attention has been paid to journalists’ perceptions of gender and gender equality.

Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli (1986) investigated the extent to which “television contributes to audience conceptions and actions in such realms as sex and age-role stereotypes, health, science, the family ...” (p. 22) and proved in empirical research the strong influential potential of television to shape and redefine the way people live and interacts with external environment. In news production, the ideological or political orientations of journalists, among others, may potentially influence how journalists frame a given issue (Tuchman, 1978), and the choice of frames often is “driven by ideology and prejudice” (Edelman, 1993, p. 232). The perceptions, attitudes, and sheer knowledge level of journalists all matter—matters to what they choose to cover, how they cover stories, who they interview, and how they write those stories.

This research studies what Chinese journalists know and think about gender equality. Do they even know what contemporary legal protections are for women? It specifically investigated journalists’ understanding of gender-related policies and how the policy of gender equality in China is realized in the society, opinions about gender roles and gender relations, as well as their sense of popular (i.e. audience) ideas concerning gender roles and gender relations.

Before delving into the methods, it is worth defining the concepts of gender roles and gender relations and related major concepts. Gender roles are a type of social roles exhibiting shared and socially constructed beliefs about men and women. Both social roles and gender roles place prescriptive expectations on behaviors based on an individual’s sex (Ayman & Korabik, 2010). Meanwhile, the literature of gender relations shows increasing complexity. Flax (1987) said that “[a] fundamental goal of feminist theory is (and ought to be) to analyze gender relations: how gender relations are constituted and experienced and how we think or, equally important, do not think about them.”

Gender as a practical social relation “can be understood only by close examination of the meanings of ‘men’ and ‘women’ and the consequences of being assigned to one or the other gender within concrete social practices” (Flax, 1987). Here, “gender relations” refers to “the attitudes and behaviors of men and women in relationships with one another and the ways in which gender roles shape social relations” (Ridgeway, 2009). This study also probes journalists’ perceptions and attitudes about gender by examining their perceptions and attitudes about the prevalent statements, often-heard statements related to gender in China.

Attitude was famously defined by Gordon Willard Allport in 1935 as a mental state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence on the individual’s response to all objects and situations to which it is related. Hence an examination of journalists’

professional practices from a gender perspective is an integral part of the study of their perceptions and attitude about gender equality.

Method and data

The survey, conducted in 2015, included 39 questions (including 11 about personal information) and an additional question asking the respondents to write briefly about the status of gender equality in China's media and what efforts should be made to promote the gender equality in China's media. In addition, the researcher carried out one-on-one hour-long interviews with 16 additional journalists (five men and 11 women) from Beijing and Shengzhen. This was followed by two focus group interviews at one television station (three men and three women in each, with each group interview lasting for one and a half hour) in Shandong Province³ and one-on-one hour-long interviews with four journalists from the focus group (two men and two women) there. Chinese language was used in the survey and interviews, and the author translated the questions and answers into English.

The study adopted the snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling is often regarded as a convenience method, and the chain-referral characteristic brings much convenience to research. The survey's target group is journalists from all over China.⁴

Prior to the formal and large-scale distribution of questionnaires, a pilot survey was carried out: 10 journalists were invited to complete the questionnaires; modifications were made according to their responses. The actual questionnaire was put online for about 2 months. Altogether 605 copies of questionnaire were collected, of which 591 were valid. Of the 591 respondents, men account for 44.2%, and women 55.8%. Some of their answers to the open-ended questions are quoted in this study.

The journalist workforce in China, according to *the Chinese Journalism Development Report* released by the All-China Journalists' Association, is nearly balanced by gender: men account for 55.87% and women 44.13% of the work force.⁵ In China, as elsewhere in the world, the word "gender" is often regarded as the topic peculiar to women. In the academia, the majority of scholars in gender studies are women; in discussing a review of 20 years' development of women and gender studies in China, a woman scholar even called for the involvement of men scholars (Editorial Department, 2015). Presumably, the disparity between the gender ratio of the respondents in the survey and that of journalism workforce in China lies in the fact women journalists are more likely to complete a questionnaire using the word "gender" as one of its key words.

The researcher adopted the official geographical division in China (North East China, North China, East China, West East China, West China, Middle South China) in the snowball sampling. The respondents came from all over China, and the percentage of respondents in each region is as follows, as Table 1 shows.

Moreover, the respondents come from the various types of media organizations now in China. Of the respondents, 19.6% are from newspaper, 3.7% from magazine, 45.7% from TV, 14% from radio and broadcasting, and 17% from Internet media.

Results

The overall perceptions and attitudes regarding gender/equality and the status of gender equality in China

Respondents were asked several questions getting at their awareness of the important gender-related laws and regulations in China, the national policy of gender equality, *Law of the People's*

Table 1. The region of the respondents.

Region	Province, autonomous region and municipality	Percentage of the respondents
Northeast China	Liaoning Province, Heilongjiang Province and Jilin Province	3.1%
North China	Beijing Municipality, Tianjin Municipality, Hebei Province, Shanxi Province and Inner Mongolia Municipality	36.1%
East China	Shanghai Municipality, Jiangsu Province, Zhejiang Province, Anhui Province, Fujian Province, Shandong Province	13.8%
Northwest China	Shaanxi Province, Gansu Province, Qinghai Province, Ningxia Autonomous Region, Xinjian Autonomous Region	23.3%
Southwest China	Chongqing Municipality, Sichuan Province, Guizhou Province, Yunnan Province, Tibet Autonomous Region	10.8%
Middle South China	Henan Province, Hubei Province, Hunan Province, Guangdong Province and Guangxi Autonomous Region	12.9%

Republic of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests, as well as the hot topic, the draft of the first national law against domestic violence, which was under discussion during the survey period. Also, to examine their awareness of the status of gender equality and gender relations in China, they were asked to comment on the status of women and men in China.

The awareness of gender-related laws and regulations. The question "How do you evaluate gender equality" had three possible answers. Some 47.9% of the respondents answered, "It is the State policy in China"; 37.2% chose "It is not the State policy in China but should become the State policy"; and 14.9% chose "It is the State policy in China but this policy is not necessary."

There is no obvious gender difference in the respondents' comments on gender equality in China. Of those who agreed gender equality is the State policy in China, men account for 48.7%, and women 47.3%. And of those who agreed gender equality should be the State policy in China, women account for 38.2%, only 2.2% higher than men. And of those who agreed gender equality is not the State policy, the percentage of men and that of women are very close (15.3% and 14.5%, respectively).

The longer the respondents have been working in the news media, the more positive comments they make regarding gender equality. The percentage of respondents who have worked for 6–9 years in the news media and held positive attitude about gender equality is slightly lower than that of respondents who have worked for 3–5 years: 2.4% fewer of the respondents believed gender equality is the State policy in China, and 7.7% fewer of the respondents believed gender equality should become the State policy. Nevertheless, much higher percentage of the respondents with 10 or more years' working experience believed gender equality is and should be the State policy, as Table 2 shows.

The *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests*, issued in 1999, is the first law concerning women's rights in China. Some 83.4% of the respondents said they had heard about it but were not clear about the details of the law. In all, 11.8% knew the details of the law, and 4.7% said they had never heard about it. There is almost no gender difference in the respondents' awareness of the law, as Table 3 shows.

Attitudes regarding the legislation of anti-domestic violence law. The *Anti-Domestic Violence Law*, China's first law criminalizing domestic violence, was enacted in late 2015. According to Chinese jurist Chen Mingxia, it is "the first law targeting the violations against citizen's basic human rights,

Table 2. Respondents' working years and comments on gender equality.

Comments on "Gender Equality"	Working years and percentage				
	Less than 1 year	1–2 years	3–5 years	6–9 years	10 years or longer
It is the State policy in China	24 8.5%	35 12.4%	55 19.4%	48 17%	121 42.8%
It is not the State policy in China but should become the State policy	26 11.8%	33 15%	55 25%	38 17.3%	68 30.9%

Table 3. Respondents' awareness of the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests.

Question and choices	Number and percentage		
	Men	Women	
Do you know the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests?	Never heard about it	13 5%	15 4.5%
	Heard about it, but don't know the main content	219 83.9%	274 83.1%
	Heard about it and know the details	29 11.1%	41 12.4%
	Total	261 100%	330 100%

especially the violence against women and vulnerable groups ... It is an important law on human rights in China" (Yu, 2016).

China's news media have contributed greatly in the process of the legislation of *The Anti-Domestic Violence Law*. Chinese media's large-scale reporting on domestic violence in China dates to the 1990s. News media's reporting makes domestic violence, which is often regarded as family affairs and belonging to private sphere, "visible" to the public. News media may arouse the public's attention to domestic violence and lead the public opinion by way of agenda-setting.⁶ Moreover, news media also provide information about the protection of victims of domestic violence and call on the legislation of anti-domestic violence law (Liu & Chen, 2015, p. 3).

While the survey was carried out, the law was not implemented yet.⁷ Asked "Do you know that China is now drafting the first law related to anti-domestic violence," only 26.2% of the respondents replied that they know and are concerned about domestic violence. Some 39.3% of the respondents said they don't know. And 34.5% said they know but are unconcerned. The fact that China's media have been playing a significant role in the legislation of anti-domestic violence law makes respondents' relative lack of concern or interest in *The Anti-Domestic Violence Law* surprising.

That said, it is not surprising that women are more aware about and concerned with *The Anti-Domestic Violence Law* than men, as Figure 1 shows.

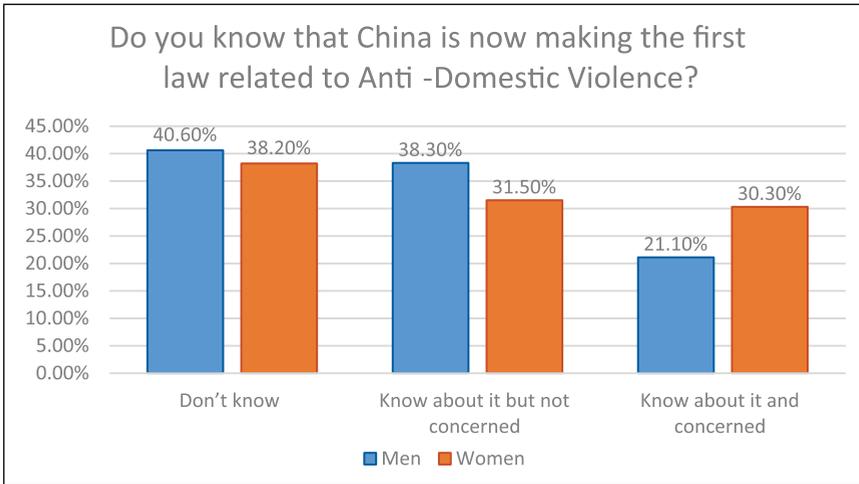


Figure 1. Respondents' awareness of the anti-domestic violence law.

However, 77.7% of the respondents said that they “strongly agree” with the statement “The legislation of the *Anti-Domestic Violence Law* has profound significance in the society,” 14.7% “agree,” 6.1% “either agree or disagree,” and only 1.5% “disagree” and “strongly disagree.”

Perceptions regarding the status of the gender equality in China. Each respondent was asked to indicate, using a 5-point Likert scale, his or her opinion about the following two statements:

At present, the status of women in China is lower than that of men.

China has achieved gender equality.

Gender made a great difference in the respondents' opinions about the two statements. The percentage of women who strongly agreed that women have lower status than men in China is more than three times the number of men, as Figure 2 shows.

Men respondents are more likely to say that China has achieved gender equality. And the percentage of men who strongly agreed China has achieved gender equality is more than four times that of women, as Figure 3 shows.

Notably, having based their observation on their own workplaces and personal preferences, some respondents said that women's status is higher than men. A man respondent said in one-on-one interview,

The society has improved a lot! How do we say there is gender inequality in China! In our organization, there is no gender difference in the treatment of staffs. We take care of our women colleagues and our editor-in-chief is a woman!

Attitudes regarding gender/gender relations and the prevalent opinions about gender in China. Each respondent was asked to indicate, using a 5-point Likert scale, his or her opinion about the following statements:

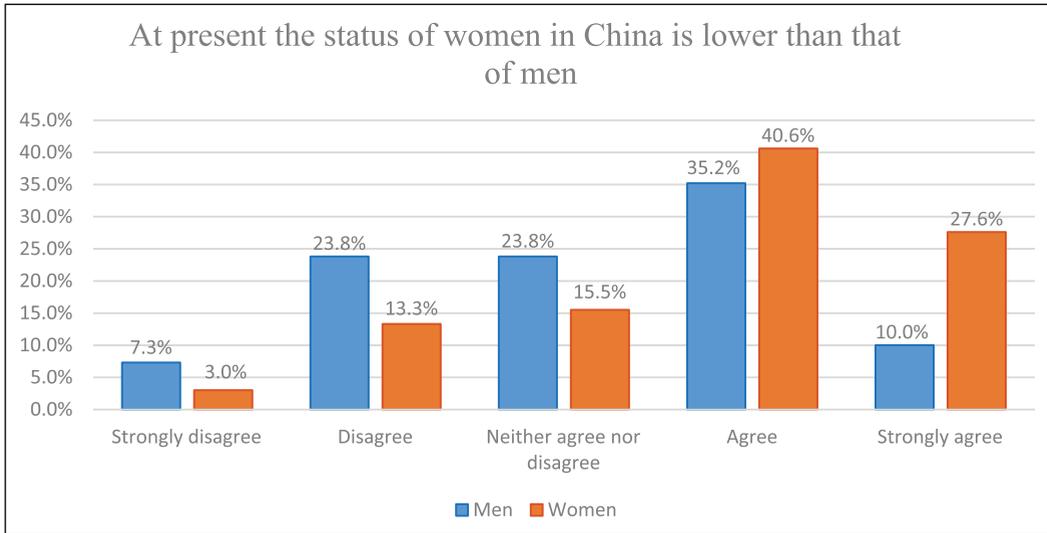


Figure 2. Respondents' opinions about "At present the status of women in China is lower than that of men."

The division of the social role between men and women is naturally established.

For a woman, being successful in career matters less than securing a good husband.

In our society, "Yanzhi"⁸ is very important for women.

In our society, "Yanzhi" is very important for men.

The traditional concept of men's and women's roles in China, that is, "Men are bread winners, women are house-keepers," can be dated back to *I Ching*, an ancient Chinese divination text and the oldest of the Chinese classics, that dates to about 6000–7000 years ago. Although people's perceptions of men's and women's roles may change with time, investigating the respondents' ideas about the traditional gender concept seems necessary. Some 63% of the respondents—both women and men—agreed that the division of the social roles between men and women is naturally established.

And some respondents expressed preference for the "natural" status of gender inequality when answering the open-ended question. For example, a man replied it is destined that men and women cannot become equal, and women are not appropriate to work in some circumstances. A woman answered that the inequality is the outcome of both natural selection and social choice; therefore, the status quo does not need to be changed.

The comparative importance between being successful in one's career and securing a good husband has become an often-discussed topic for women in China in recent years. Li (2004) and Zhang (2014) noted that the statement "For a woman being successful in career matters less than securing a good husband" embodied the traditional gender role concept of "men being bread winners and women house-keepers" in China. However, Chinese sociologist Wu (2009) pointed out that the statement emerged after the reform and opening-up in late 1970s with the introduction of market economy in China. Wu takes this statement to refer to social structure: it indicates that women lack the opportunity for a

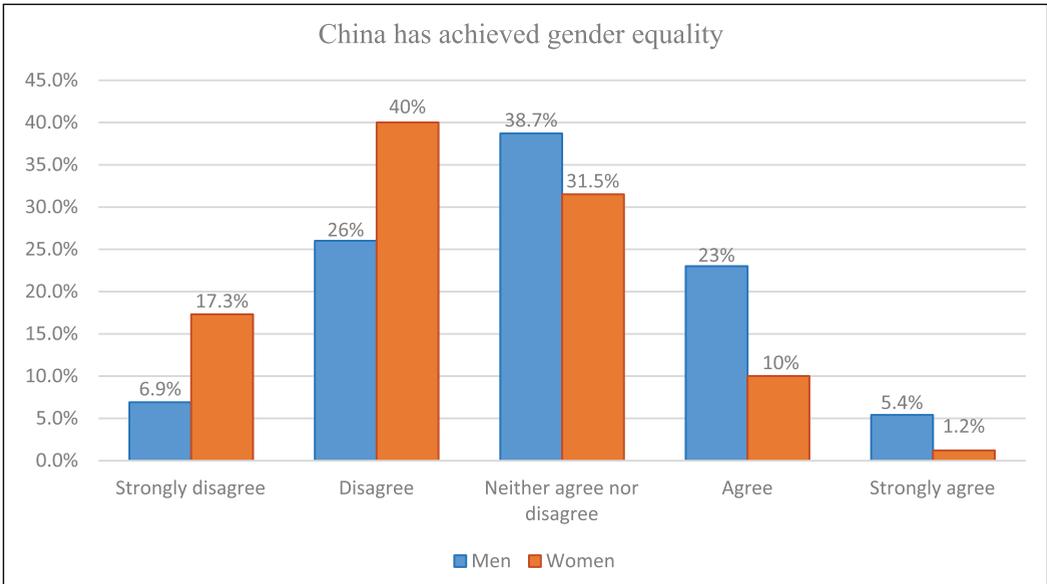


Figure 3. Respondents' opinions about "China has achieved gender equality."

successful career due to the lack of opportunity and/or unfair competition between men and women. And women who want a successful career may confront additional obstacles. From a cultural perspective, women who are successful in their careers may not "secure a good husband"; sometimes they even cannot find a husband. And a consumerist focus on body pleasure returns women to the traditional gender discourse, in which "securing a good husband" is the goal. Wu (2017) noted that a new type of gender standard is emerging in the context of statements about "being successful in career" and "securing a good husband," that is, men's value is realized in the society and women's value in the family.

Regardless of the academic undertones that the comparative importance between "being successful in career" and "securing a good husband" may reveal, Chinese people are increasingly accepting that "being successful in career matters less than securing a good husband." The third wave survey on the Social Status of Women in China, jointly launched and organized by the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) and National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), in 2010, shows that since 2000, some 40.7% of the men respondents and 48% of the women respondents agree that for women, securing a good husband is more important, with an increase of 10.5% and 10.7%, respectively, than the second survey in 2000 (ACWF Project Group of the Third Survey on the Status of Chinese Women, 2011).

Of the 591 respondents, 52.8% agreed with the statement that "for women being successful in career matters less than securing a good husband," and the percentage of men is much higher than that of women. That is, in men's opinion, family is more important to women than career. This accords with the result of the survey on the Social Status of Women in China, as Figure 4 shows.

And people in China are increasingly noting the importance of appearance in society. In 2015, the new word "Yanzhi" ("Yan" means "appearance," and "Zhi" means "value"), the description of appearance by a numerical rating, was on the list of the top 10 buzzwords of 2015 by *YAOWEN-JIAOZI*, a monthly Chinese linguistic journal.

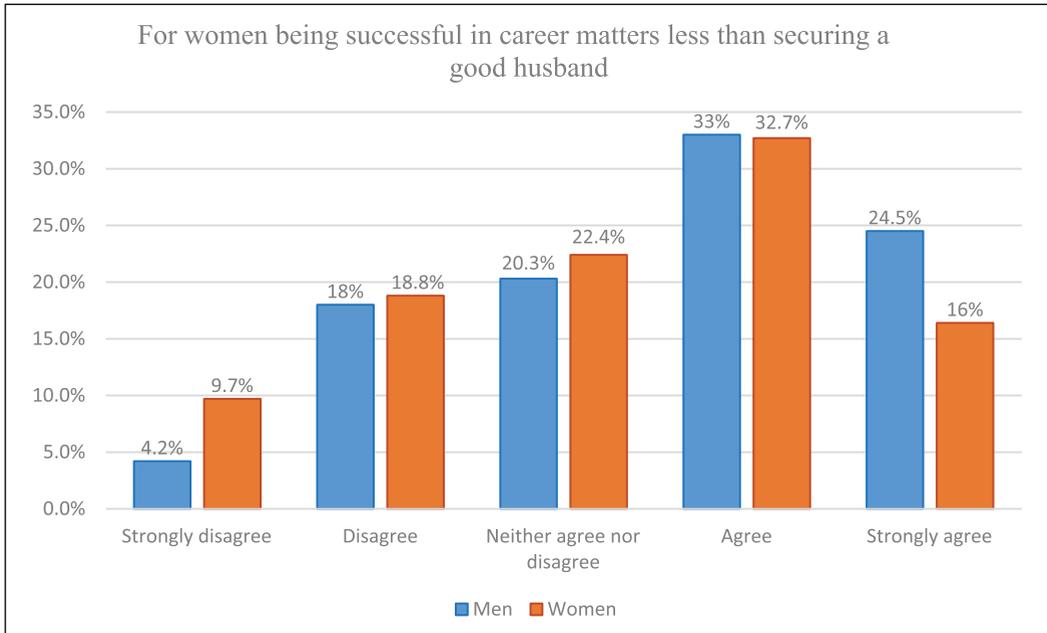


Figure 4. Respondents' attitudes regarding "Being Successful in Career" and "Securing a Good Husband" for women.

The majority (86.6%) of the respondents agreed that "In our society 'Yanzhi' is very important for women." It is worth noting that none of the men strongly disagreed that "Yanzhi" is very important for women. Only 35.3% agreed that "Yanzhi" is very important for men.

A cross-analysis between the gender of the respondents and their attitudes about the two statements shows that 46.4% of the women respondents strongly agreed that "Yanzhi" is important for women, 6.6% higher than men. On the other hand, 43% of the men respondents agreed and strongly agreed that "Yanzhi" is important for men, 14.2% higher than women. This shows that although women and men respondents have different attitudes about the importance of "Yanzhi", either group attaches much importance to "Yanzhi" for their own gender.

A cross-analysis between the respondents' employing media organizations and their attitudes about the statement of "Yanzhi" being important for women shows that the highest percentage of the respondents working at TV stations agreed with the statement, followed by those working in Internet media. This is not surprising considering visual images play important roles in the content of TV and Internet media, as Figure 5 shows.

Similar results appear whether "Yanzhi" is very important for men." Of the 209 respondents who agreed and strongly agreed, 41.6% are from TV and 20.6% from Internet media.

Journalists' attitudes about media and professional practices

Audiences' preference for news. The respondents were asked to choose the types of the news they believe men and women audiences prefer. News can be categorized into six types, that is, current

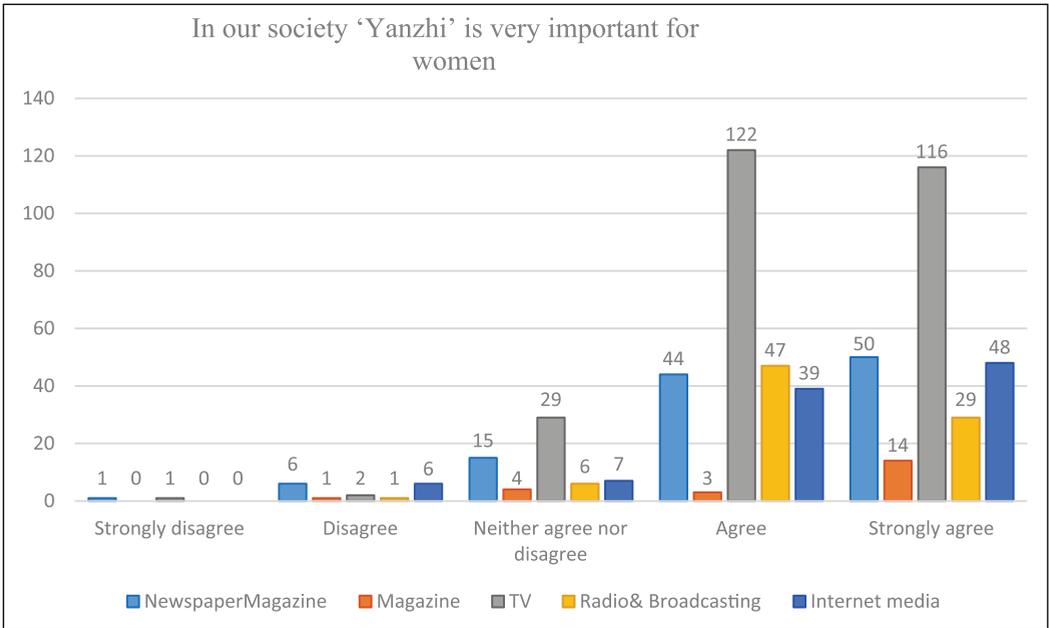


Figure 5. Attitudes of respondents from different news organizations regarding the importance of “Yanzhi” to women.

affairs, society and lifestyle news, finance, sports, culture news, and entertainment; respondents were also allowed to answer “Other.”

The results show that journalists assume women and men audiences prefer very different kinds of news content. As to the most preferred news type among men audiences, 93.9% of the respondents chose current affairs and 90.5% sports news. When it comes to women audiences’ news preference, 95.1% of the respondents chose entertainment news and 83.1% social and lifestyle news, as Figure 6 shows.

Figure 6 shows that in respondents’ opinion, the news is gendered. It is worth noting that, as North (2016) summarizes, “hard news” centers on “serious stories about important topics” including politics, economics, major crime/accidents, and public interest matters, while “soft news” is centered on features or human-interest stories, unusual events and trends, personalities, or lifestyle. “Hard news” is considered the most prestigious type of journalism and it is mostly undertaken by men reporters and soft news entertains and may evoke emotions. The research design here did not involve categorizing news as “hard” or “soft” but some respondents did so, in any case. According to respondents, “Current Affairs” news, the men audiences’ preferred type of news, undoubtedly belong to “hard news,” the more prestigious type of news; women audiences were assumed to prefer “soft news,” the less important type of news.

Journalists’ preference for news and news topic in their professional practices. Some studies in news production and gender have pointed out news production is horizontally segregated, with men tending to cover topics such as the economy and sports and women covering topics in human-interest and entertainment (cf. Claringbould, Knoppers, & Elling, 2004). Asked to choose which

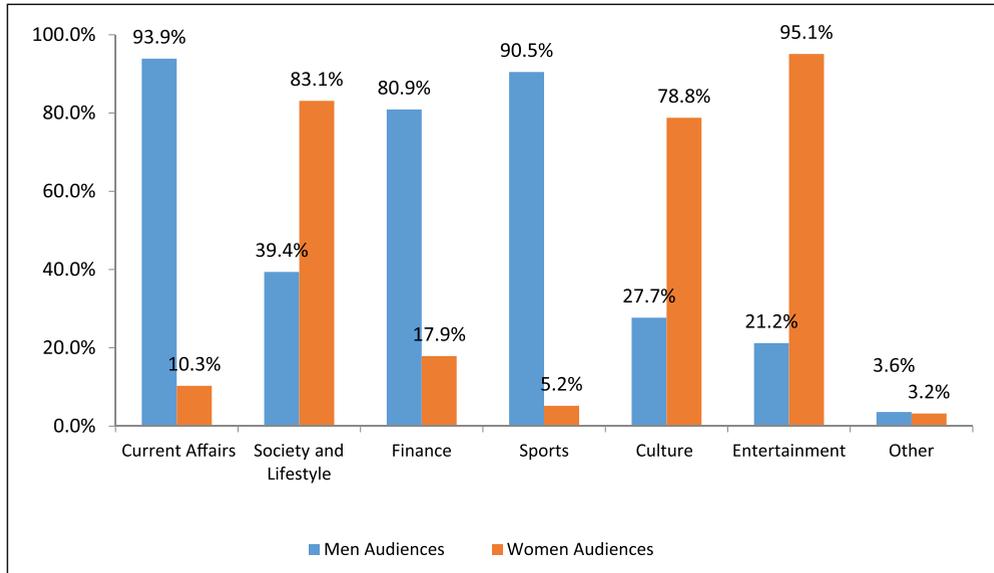


Figure 6. Journalists' opinions about audiences' news preference.

newsbeats they believe are most appropriate to men journalists, 93.2% of respondents chose sports news, 92.4% current affairs, and 83.4% financial news. As to newsbeats appropriate to women journalists, 92% chose culture news, 90.7% entertainment news, and 82.4% social and life news. In all, 93.2% of the respondents said that sports news is the beat that is most appropriate to men journalists and inappropriate to women journalists.

And among the newsbeats which are regarded as most appropriate to men journalists, the financial news is the news with the least gender gap. Among the newsbeats which are regarded as most appropriate to women journalists, the social and life news is the news with the least gender gap, as Figure 7 shows.

The influence of media content. The respondents were asked to indicate, using a 5-point Likert scale, their opinion about the statement "Images of women with pornographic undertones will influence audiences negatively." Some 74.3% of the respondents agreed with the statement. A cross-analysis between the gender of the respondents and their attitude about the statement shows that of the respondents who agreed with the statement, the percentage of men is slightly higher than women (39.8% and 36.7%, respectively). However, 40% of the women respondents strongly agreed with the statement, 8.6% higher than that of men. This indicates that women are more sensitive to the negative influence of the pornographic images of their own gender.

And 50.2% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that "The media content which discriminates women is just a mirror to the society." Women and men respondents' attitudes did not differ in any significant way. Of those who strongly agreed with the statement, the percentages of men and women are very close (11.1% and 12.4% respectively). However, of those who strongly disagreed with the statement, the percentage of women is 7.3% and that of men is 2.7%. This indicates that some women respondents may have noticed other factors leading to the discrimination on women in media content.

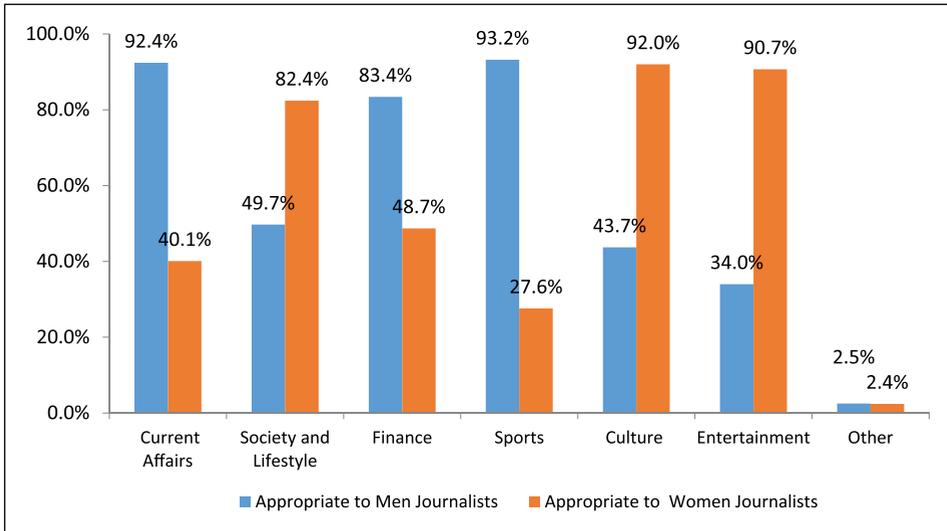


Figure 7. Newsbeats appropriate to journalists of different genders.

During interviews, respondents expressed a range of attitudes about the media objectification and sexualization of women. A woman respondent said such phenomenon is nothing serious. She said,

I really don't think the objectification and sexualization of women are problems. As you can see, men are being sexualized and being gazed by audiences. Aren't the audiences are gazing at Ning Zhetao as if they are consuming something?⁹ How do people watch handsome men? Their eyes, their face, their body, legs, muscles ... Is it the same way with how they watch women? I don't know what it is like in other countries. In my opinion, it is a trend that a lot Chinese seek material and visual pleasure more than spiritual pleasure. While public figures are concerned, people do not have many ways to know about them other than their appearance and superficial issues. This can be called "visual consumption."

Some respondents realized the negative influence of objectification and sexualization of women in the media and have already adjusted their reporting. For example, during the one-on-one interview, a woman said, in her view, overemphasizing women car models in car exhibition reports sexualized the models. Therefore, when she herself reported on car exhibition, she shifted the reporting focus from the car models to the cars themselves, such as the design and the function of the cars.

The role of media in gender equality. The majority (83.2%) of the respondents believe media can play an important role in promoting gender equality. Among those who strongly agree with media's important role in gender equality, men account for 48.7% and women 53%.

And some respondents expressed worries in this respect. A woman respondent said in one-on-one interview,

My deepest impression about reporting about gender and gender equality is that we are moving backwards. Women's self-discrimination is also serious. For example, in the media you may see a lot "biao" (bitch)

Table 4. The necessity for journalists to enhance perceptions about gender equality.

Gender	Number of respondents	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Men	261	2.7%	11.9%	24.1%	28.7%	32.6%
Women	330	1.2%	8.2%	15.2%	23%	52.4%

words.¹⁰ A lot media and even women like using these words. And I also notice that the condemnation, misunderstanding and gender stereotypes in the postings to the news about women. Under this circumstance, it's really hard to disseminate the ideas of gender equality via reporting.

Gender-related training among journalists. Gender-related training is an important way to promote journalists' gender/equality awareness. The women's TV program of China Central Television (CCTV), "Half the Sky," first organized training for its program producers in 1999. Now, gender-related training and workshops for media professionals are organized by various organizations ranging from government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), research institutions, and so on.

Nevertheless, 92.9% of the respondents answered they had never attended gender-related trainings or workshops, although 71.4% of the respondents agreed that journalists should improve their perceptions about the ideas of gender equality. Not surprisingly, compared with men, about 20% more women strongly agreed it is necessary to enhance journalists' perceptions of gender equality, as Table 4 shows.

Journalist's professional practices in representing gender and disseminating the ideas of gender equality

Journalists' attitudes about media and professional practices may not necessarily be enacted in practice. Therefore, examining journalists' professional practices in disseminating the ideas of gender equality may help understand their perceptions and attitudes in this respect, which focuses on the media content production from the content choice in reportage about news personalities, choice of information sources, and news reportage about women-related issues.

The content choice in reportage about news personalities. The leading principles of objectivity and authenticity in news reporting do not preclude selectivity in news production. When making media reportage featuring women figures, the respondents prefer information relevant to the private or domestic sphere, such as marriage and family; while men figures are concerned, they prefer public or societal topics such as career, as Figure 8 shows.

The fact that journalists seem to care more about a man's career but more about a woman's marriage and family in news personalities reportage may show their work routine in media production. A woman respondent shared her stories in one-on-one interview:

In auto racing the majority of the drivers are men. While we interview men drivers, we will design questions centering the racing skill, records, and the details of the racing. When it comes to women drivers, we may focus on their personal background and growing-up stories. That is, our reportage about women drivers is stories-driven. The gender of the driver decides our reporting focuses.

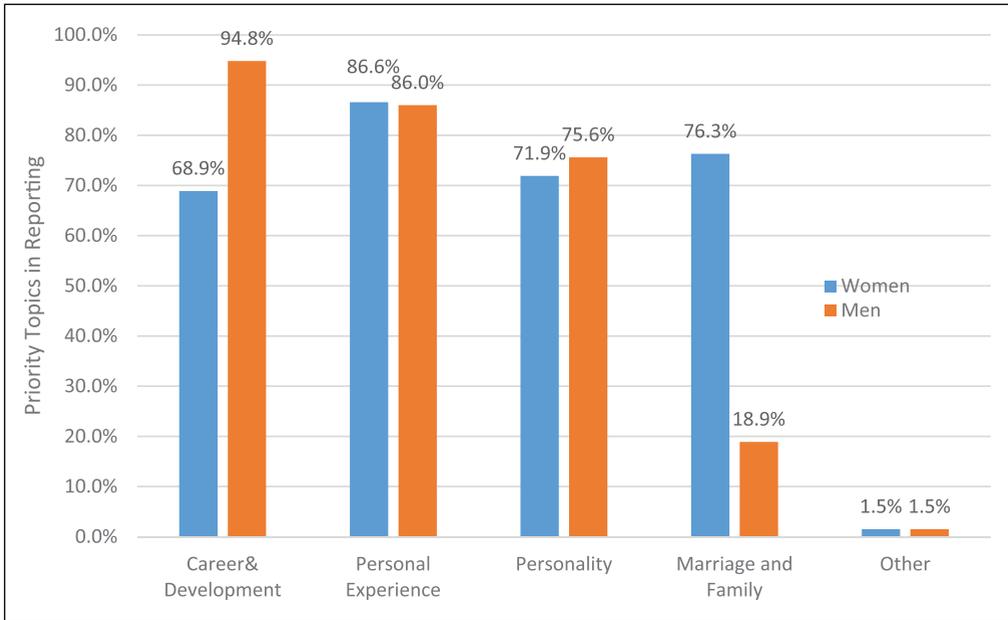


Figure 8. Priority topics in reportage about news personalities of different genders.

And a man respondent seemed to justify his counterpart’s opinion by claiming, “definitely there are different reporting focuses while we report about different genders, because women and men have different thinking patterns and behaviors.” However, some respondents realized the limitation of such reporting. A woman respondent said in one-on-one interview,

I may not take gender into special consideration when I report about news personalities. When I report about a woman, the reportage will not be confined to her gender. Instead, I will highlight her achievements. The reportage with conflicting and dramatic elements will easily get broadcasted.

Source of information. The fact that journalists tend to use a narrow range of sources, that is, people at the top, as sources of information has long been noted by scholars. This is particularly true of sources whose views are solicited in order to yield expert opinions (Ross & Carter, 2011). The GMMP 2010 audit of a day’s news on five news websites in China on the monitoring day found that 29% of sources quoted in the news are women, while men are 71%.

The survey shows that whether in choosing interviewees or seeking experts’ opinion, most respondents do not consider the gender of the source of information. In all, 78% of the respondents said they would not consider the gender of interviewees and 91% said they would not consider the gender of the experts. Nevertheless, 5.3% of the respondents said that in their professional practices, they interviewed or consulted more men experts than women, and only 3% said they interviewed or consulted more women experts. And 23.7% said they interviewed or consulted men and women equally.

Asked whether the respondents or their employing media organizations had ever consulted experts in reportage about women or women issues, 43.7% of the respondents said yes and 18.6% said never.

It should be pointed out that 37.7% of the respondents said that their employing news organizations have never produced women-related programs nor reported about women-related issues.

Personal concern for reportage about women's rights and women-related issues. The survey shows the respondents are concerned about women's rights such as women's employment, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. Women are more concerned about women's rights than men, with the percentage 66.4% and 49.4%, respectively.

And women-related issues in the survey mainly refer to the issues directly related to women's rights and development. Of the survey respondents, 50.6% said few women-related issues get reported by their employing news organizations. And 56.7% of the women respondents pointed out the paucity of women-related issues reportage, 7.3% higher than men, as Figure 9 shows.

This is supported by a 2014 study of TV news reported by China's 5 Provincial TV Stations in 2014, which found that of 1010 news stories, only 66 pieces were on women-related issues (Liu & Chen, 2015). All these show that women-related issues are much underrepresented and marginalized in China's media.

The reasons for reporting about women-related issues. When explaining why the respondents' employing media organizations report about women-related issues, 79.2% of them answered the value of women-related issues in the society determines whether women-related issues get reported or not. In all, 43.5% said that the news organizations report about women-related issues because such issues can catch the attention of audiences. And 36.2% said the reportage results from the requirement of higher level administrators; 19.8% said women-related issues get reported by their news organization because such issues have been reported by other news organizations. This range of opinion suggests that the social value of the women-related issues is the main factor determining whether or not women-related issues get reported, followed by the commercial and political considerations.

Moreover, there is an age difference among the respondents in their explanations for media organizations' reportage about women-related issues. The younger the respondents are, the more likely they will point to the "social value" and the "attention-catching" elements of women-related issues. The older the respondents are, the more likely they will point to the requirements of upper-level administrators, as Table 5 shows.

In China, according to *the Chinese Journalism Development Report* released by the All-China Journalists' Association until late 2016, young and middle-aged journalists constitute the majority of the workforce, with 9.72% journalists below age 30 and 38.92% at the age between 30 and 40. The journalists at the age between 40 and 50 account for 34.2%, and the percentage of the journalists who are above 50 years is 17.15%.¹¹

Thus, the large percentage of younger journalists and their preference for the social value of reportage about women-related issues predict that the underrepresentation and marginalization of women-related issues in China's media may soon change.

Conclusion and discussion

The survey shows that several intertwining factors influence journalists' perceptions and attitudes about gender and gender equality. The gender of the journalists is the foremost factor. The survey shows that compared with their men counterparts, women journalists are more prone to notice the gender inequality they themselves and Chinese women as a group are facing in the society, such as

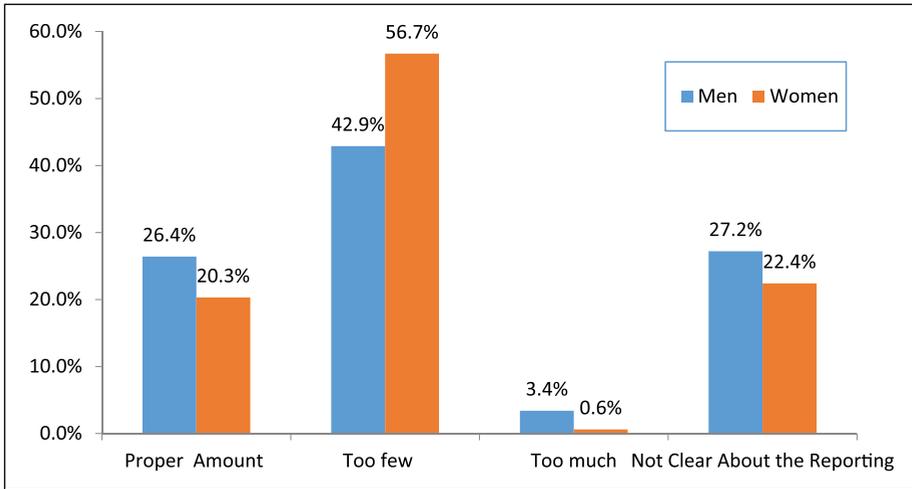


Figure 9. Opinions about the amount of women-related issues reportage.

Table 5. Reasons for the media organizations to report about women-related issues.

Age of respondents (years)	Reasons for media organizations' women-related issues reportage				
	Catch the attention of audiences	Certain social value	Other media organizations have ever reported	Requirements of the administrators in the upper level	Other
24 and below	55.7%	91.8%	18%	31.1%	9%
25–34	46.1%	79.9%	21.4%	32.2%	2.4%
35–44	41.2%	77%	20.3%	42.6%	2.7%
45 and above	19.6%	76.1%	4.3%	43.5%	4.3%

the relatively low social status of women and the priority of family in the society's expectation for women. And women journalists are more concerned with women-related issues and more sensible to the gender inequality as represented by media.

It is important to point out that while all journalists face similar problems, their gender plays even more important role. For example, 86.6% of the respondents regarded “Yanzhi” as very important for women; only 35.3% of the respondents agreed that “‘Yanzhi’ is very important for men.” However, further scrutiny of the data shows that more women respondents believed “Yanzhi” is important for women and more men respondents believed “Yanzhi” is important for men.

On the other hand, journalists' perceptions and attitudes about gender and gender equality arise from their society. In China, although the principle of gender equality has become a legal reality, a gap exists between law and reality. The finding that more than half of the respondents think the status of women in China is lower than that of men may show this. And the prevalent opinions about the gender and gender relations in Chinese society such as the division of men and women's roles, the importance of women's appearance, the priority of women's marriage over career, and so on are also prevalent among the respondents.

Respondents' professional identity as journalists also influences their perceptions and attitudes about gender and gender equality. The survey shows respondents mostly agree with and practice the traditional male-dominated principles both in journalism and newsroom, even if many of them state deep gender and gender equality awareness. And their working experience but not gender influences their perceptions and attitudes about the gender-related laws and regulations in China.

Although the survey shows 71.4% of the respondents agreed journalists should disseminate the ideas of gender equality in professional practices, both the survey and interviews show the great necessity to promote journalists' perceptions about gender and gender equality. In reply to the open-ended question, a man respondent doubted the relationship between gender equality and social development, and a man even said feminism in China is a joke. A woman answered, "I feel we are over-emphasizing gender equality, especially women's rights, which itself is unequal." A man said women are quite aggressive and urged the researchers to carry out field work in media organizations instead of asking questions about gender equality.

What's more, journalists, especially women journalists, tend to internalize the gender conceptions which relegate women to secondary position. A woman respondent replied to the open-ended question, "Most of the time it's no necessary to advocate gender equality, because women and men have different duties. Women's duty is assisting husband and bringing up children and men's duty is supporting family and developing career."

In China, where gender equality is State policy, people's perceptions and attitudes about gender and gender equality may influence the ultimate realization of gender equality. Journalists play an important role in shaping and influencing the public's gender concepts and gender equality awareness. Further research is required to determine how journalists can improve perceptions of gender equality besides gender-related training. Even more importantly, whether and how journalists can transcend the limitations of restricting factors, such as gender, the prevalent gender concepts of the society, and professional practice rules, to disseminate the ideas of gender equality, remain important topics either in research or practice.

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Notes

1. As to the details, see <http://www.cinfo.org.cn/language/english/progress/progs0039.jsp>.
2. Article 1 of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests*.
3. Shandong Province, a pivotal cultural and religious site for Confucianism, the far-reaching traditional culture in China. Confucianism, among others, largely defined the mainstream discourse on gender in China since the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) and prescribed the gender roles in the Three Obediences (a woman must obey her father as a daughter, her husband as a wife, and her sons in widowhood)

and Four Virtues (feminine virtues of morality, proper speech, modest manner/appearance, and diligent work). The interviews and focus group interviews with journalists in Shandong may serve as a complement to the interviews in Beijing and Shengzhen, cosmopolitan cities where the influence of traditional gender culture may not be so strong.

4. According to *the Chinese Journalism Development Report* released by All-China Journalists' Association in 2015, the journalist workforce consists of 257,878 journalists.
5. Retrieved from http://en.theorychina.org/chinatoday_2483/whitebooks/201504/t20150407_321169.shtml and the authoritative and national statistics about Chinese journalists by other demographic variables—for example, working years or experience, what platform they work for (print, online, etc.), salary, rank, region—are not available.
6. The writer ever searched the keyword “domestic violence” with China’s largest searching engine “Baidu,” and found that from 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2014, there were 65,400 pieces of news report. From 12 September 2014 to 19 September 2014, series of documentary titled “Records of Anti-Domestic Violence in China” was broadcast on CCTV Society and Law Channel, which exerted deep social influence.
7. From 25 November 2014 to 25, December 2014, State Council Legislative Affairs Office in China sought Public Comments on the Anti-Domestic Violence Law of the People’s Republic of China (Draft for Comment). More than 1 year after the release of the draft, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress issued “The Anti-Domestic Violence Law” on 27 December 2015.
8. The expression is used by young people in China to indicate whether someone is good-looking or not. A person with high or sensational “yanzhi” is someone who is extremely handsome or beautiful. While those who are homely, or are “Plain Jane,” and not good-looking are regarded as low “yanzhi.”
9. A Chinese competitive swimmer who specializes in the freestyle and won a gold medal in the 100-m freestyle at the 2015 World Championships. He gained thousands of fans online in China for his physique and “model” good looks and is called “husband material” in social media.
10. In Chinese, “biao” (bitch) is a word with discriminatory undertones. There are a lot words over the Internet ending with “biao” to describe different women groups, such as “Lvchabiao” (Green Tea Bitch, the term to describe those ambitious women who pretend to be innocent) and “Dulibiao” (Surprise Bitch, the term to describe successful women who claim to be dependent but hide the fact that they rely on men to achieve success).
11. Retrieved from http://news.xinhuanet.com/zg/jx/2017-05/31/c_136314150_5.htm

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