

# Research on Professional Evaluation and Professional Identity of Chinese Journalists

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## ABSTRACT

Journalists are a special and important professional group in China today. This paper intends to explore the various dimensions of journalists' professional evaluation, analyze its impact on professional identity, and try to explore the logic of journalists' professional identity construction from the perspective of self-evaluation and social evaluation. Through a questionnaire survey of 4170 journalists in China, the relationship between different factors such as satisfaction, loyalty, respect and trust are analyzed. In addition, research and field surveys in some areas were supplemented, including in-depth interviews with 22 practitioners. The study found that journalists' professional evaluation directly affects their professional identity. The higher the evaluation, the higher the loyalty to the profession, and the higher the job satisfaction, which means the stronger the professional identity. The formation of professional identity is an interactive process of individual cognition and social shaping. It not only needs the continuous strengthening of self-identity, but also needs tolerance and recognition from the social level and balances the influence between self-identity and social identity. The research perspective of this paper is innovative, focusing on the relationship between professional evaluation and professional identity of journalists. Under the background of the spread of global journalism crisis discourse, it can comprehensively show the complex picture of China's journalism reform.

**Keywords:** *professional evaluation, professional identity, social evaluation, self-evaluation, journalist*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Identity is malleable. Huntington advocated by looking for the opposite to establish identity, from the 'enemy' imagination to seek their own image.[1] Giddens and Mardini also pointed out that identity construction needs external factors.[2] Durkheim associated identity with 'collective consciousness', and believed that identity is actually the internal cohesion that unites different people in the community.[3] Thus, whether out of active construction or passive shaping, limited identity is always based on the call for collective memory. [4]

The development of China's media industry has brought a growing group of journalists, but this professional group is sharply divided. With the aggravation of news ethics anomie, the decline of social evaluation and the depreciation of self-identity, the professional identity of journalists presents a complex and diverse picture. Professional evaluation is mainly reflected by news practitioners' respect and trust in their own careers, which further reflects their professional reputation and status. This study analyses the self-evaluation and social evaluation of journalists to explore the impact of the balance between the two on the construction of professional identity.

## 2. RESEARCH DESIGN

### 2.1. Research Content

To explore the above content, the research focuses on the following issues:

What is the professional evaluation of journalists ?

What is its impact on professional identity, enriching or dispelling the choice of professional identity and the persistence of professional behaviour ?

How to shape professional identity between self-evaluation and social evaluation ?

### 2.2. Research Methods

This study uses in-depth interviews and questionnaires. There are a total of 22 in-depth interviewees. Media types include newspapers, radio, television and new media, covering both central and local media. Respondents include journalists, editors, hosts, broadcasters and other different positions. Reporting areas are relatively extensive. In addition to ordinary journalists, there are also many people with administrative positions in leadership positions, more comprehensive understanding of the situation. Most of the respondents have a long

working life, while some are senior journalists who have entered the field of journalism for a short time, providing different perspectives.

Overall, the respondents are representative. In view of the protection of the interviewees' information and the reasonable requirements of some interviewees, they are finally confidentially processed, anonymously arranged according to their interview time sequence, and unified numbered with Arabic numerals.

The data analysis part comes from 2015-2017. The author participated in the 'Scientific Literacy Survey of Journalists' which was commissioned by China Association of Science and Technology and China Journalism Association.

It is a national survey that provides a large data sample and covers a comprehensive range of media types, levels and journalists. A total of 4170 valid questionnaires were collected, with an effective recovery rate of 81.6 %.

### 3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. Derogatory in self-evaluation

The practical difficulties and encounters of the news industry have brought about the crisis of self-identity of journalists, and there is a tendency of self-deprecation. 'News migrant workers' has become a name of self-deprecation and self-negation for journalists. It generally reflects dissatisfaction with deteriorating working conditions, reduced pay and increased intensity of work.

Actually, living conditions and employment ecology of journalists is not optimistic. After fading the halo, journalists feel more powerlessness, confusion and helplessness in reality.

In the face of low returns, high intensity, sub-health and other practical difficulties, coupled with the constraints and high pressure from the external environment, more and more journalists begin to depreciate themselves. With the social prestige and economic status of journalists gradually declining, journalists' self-identity of their professional social status and specialization also began to show a downward trend.

According to the 2015 survey on social prestige of different occupations by the Social Survey Center of China Youth Daily, there was no journalist in the top five occupations, and the top five were scientific researchers, university professors, engineers, doctors and lawyers. 78.9 % of respondents had low social prestige in their careers, and 41.3 % did not even want their children to engage in their careers. [5]

The author has participated in the national survey of the scientific quality of journalists, the results also showed that journalists did not have a high evaluation on degree of respect and trust about their profession in society.

When it comes to the degree of respect for journalists in society, only 23.9 % of the people thought it was

relatively high, most of them chose general (55.4 %), and even a considerable number of people thought it was relatively low (13.4 %), as shown in Fig. 1

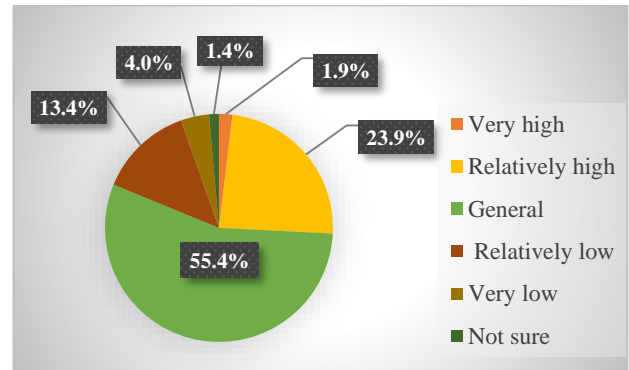


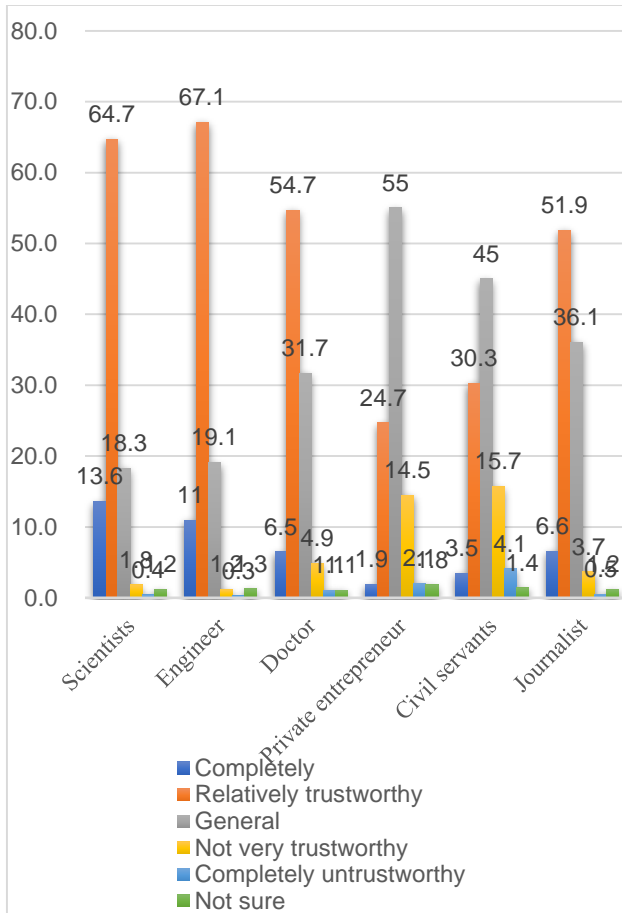
Figure 1. How do you think the degree of respect for journalists in Chinese society?

In terms of trust, according to Fig. 2, compared horizontally with other industries, although journalists accounted for a higher proportion of trustworthy ranks than civil servants and private entrepreneurs, they were slightly inferior to engineers, scientists and doctors. Specifically, more than half chose journalists as relatively trustworthy, although only 6.6 % were fully trusted.

There were also a large number of people who viewed that journalists were generally trustworthy, accounting for 36.1%. Even a small number of people thought that they were not very trustworthy, or completely untrustworthy. Generally speaking, the degree of respect and trust of journalists was not satisfactory.

#### 3.2. Decline in social evaluation

In 1919, Max Weber, a German sociologist, once evaluated the journalist industry in this way. He believed that journalists, politicians and lawyers had similar fates, lacking not only fixed social affiliation, but also low evaluation.



**Figure 2.** How do you think the degree of trust among different occupational groups in Chinese society?

The evaluation of mainstream media journalists tends to be positive. ( Respondent No. 4 ) But overall social evaluation of the media is not high,(Respondent No.3) even gradually lower. (Respondent No.20) The halo had faded away. (Respondent No. 1) Some journalists were of low quality and even had no bottom line. (Respondent No. 7)Perhaps the image of the media wasn't very good at the beginning. (Respondent No. 8) Journalists do not have their own independent opinions, which is the microphone of government departments. (Respondent No. 10) Respondent No. 21felt that the reporter's initial 'crownless king' of light and responsibility seems to gradually decline. From an objective point of view, some people's bad impressions on journalists come from news corruption, including paid news, the threat of abuse of editing rights and so on. This is related to the current social environment. (Respondent No.18) Due to serious constraints, the value of journalists is seriously underestimated (Respondent No.17) Social evaluation is essentially the relationship between media journalists and the public, which is like a seesaw. In the eyes of most journalists, their social evaluation is not high.

### 3.3. Professional Evaluation and Identity

Professional prestige includes not only social evaluation, that is, how the public views a particular occupation, but also self-evaluation, that is, the position of the occupation in the social system. [6] Professional social prestige is like a person's word of mouth. Usually, the higher the professional social prestige, the higher the public recognition, and the higher the professional identity of the practitioners.

Psychologist Maslow put forward the hierarchy of human needs, from physiology, security, sociality to respect and self-realization, the needs are progressive. The need to respect clearly indicates the recognition of society, respect for others. Whether these inner needs are met or not directly affects the practitioners' affirmation or suspicion of their occupation, that is, people are eager to improve their enthusiasm for work and mobilize their enthusiasm for work through the understanding and respect given by society.

Therefore, the degree of social respect also has a certain impact on the professional identity level of journalists. Satisfaction and loyalty are two important dimensions of professional identity. Through the correlation analysis between satisfaction, loyalty and professional evaluation, we can explore the influence of professional evaluation on professional identity.

#### 3.3.1. Satisfaction and professional evaluation

The overall job satisfaction was high. Also, news practitioners who were satisfied or relatively satisfied with the job had higher judgment on the degree of respect for professional identity in society. As shown in Table 1, 11.5 % of the people who were satisfied with the job thought that the degree of respect for the job was high, which was higher than that of the people who were relatively satisfied ( 0.8 % ), and those who were not satisfied ( 0.5 % ).

Similarly, the proportion of people with high job satisfaction who believed that professional respect was relatively high was also positively correlated, 40.6 %, 25.4 %, 9.0 % and 6.8 %, respectively. On the contrary, people with low job satisfaction had relatively low judgment on the degree of respect for the professional society. According to chi-square test of satisfaction and respect in Table 2, sig value is less than 0.05, so different satisfactions have significant differences in the degree of occupational respect. The higher the satisfaction is, the more the sense of accomplishment and status of the occupation is perceived, so the higher the degree of respect for the occupation is judged. From this perspective, satisfaction plays a positive guiding role in professional evaluation.

**3.3.2. Loyalty and professional evaluation**

In fact, professional evaluation will also affect occupational loyalty. Taking the cross-analysis of respect and quit intention as an example, as shown in Table 4, the two are significantly correlated (sig < 0.05). For practitioners with a high degree of occupational respect,

the proportion of people who have no intention to resign is usually higher. Therefore, it is believed that the higher the degree of respect for journalists in society, the more positive the judgment and evaluation of occupation, the stronger the sense of honor brought by occupation, the lower their willingness to resign, and the higher their professional loyalty.

**Table 1.** Cross analysis of satisfaction and respect

			How do you think the degree of respect for journalists in Chinese society?						Total
			Very high	Relatively high	General	Relatively low	Very low	Not sure	
Overall, how satisfied are you with your job?	Very satisfied	Count	46	162	153	27	6	5	399
		Overall, how satisfied are you with your job? %	11.5%	40.6%	38.3%	6.8%	1.5%	1.3%	100.0%
	Relatively satisfied	Count	23	693	1581	322	76	38	2733
		Overall, how satisfied are you with your job? %	0.8%	25.4%	57.8%	11.8%	2.8%	1.4%	100.0%
	Not very satisfied	Count	3	59	375	153	58	7	655
		Overall, how satisfied are you with your job? %	0.5%	9.0%	57.3%	23.4%	8.9%	1.1%	100.0%
	Very dissatisfied	Count	1	4	21	14	16	3	59
		Overall, how satisfied are you with your job? %	1.7%	6.8%	35.6%	23.7%	27.1%	5.1%	100.0%
	Total	Count	73	918	2130	516	156	53	3846
		Overall, how satisfied are you with your job? %	1.9%	23.9%	55.4%	13.4%	4.1%	1.4%	100.0%

**Table 2.** Chi-square test of satisfaction and respect

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	573.709 <sup>a</sup>	15	.000
Likelihood Ratio	433.363	15	.000
Linear-by-linear Association	305.484	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	3846		

a. 3 cells (12.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .81.

**3.4. The Logic of Professional Identity Construction: Balance between social evaluation and self-evaluation**

The sincere recognition from the public is undoubtedly the highest praise for the journalist profession. Facing all kinds of negative evaluations, how should journalists respond?

**Table 3.** Cross analysis of respect and quit intention

			Have you ever thought about resigning or changing your job?			Total
			No	Occasionally	Really	
How do you think the degree of respect for journalists in Chinese society?	Very high	Count	3	7	4	14
		How do you think the degree of respect for journalists in Chinese society? %	21.4%	50.0%	28.6%	100.0%
	Relatively high	Count	47	221	18	286
		How do you think the degree of respect for journalists in Chinese society? %	16.4%	77.3%	6.3%	100.0%
	General	Count	108	879	115	1102
		How do you think the degree of respect for journalists in Chinese society? %	9.8%	79.8%	10.4%	100.0%
	Relatively low	Count	23	272	58	353
		How do you think the degree of respect for journalists in Chinese society? %	6.5%	77.1%	16.4%	100.0%
	Very low	Count	12	76	39	127
		How do you think the degree of respect for journalists in Chinese society? %	9.4%	59.8%	30.7%	100.0%
	Not sure	Count	1	12	9	22
		How do you think the degree of respect for journalists in Chinese society? %	4.5%	54.5%	40.9%	100.0%
	Total	Count	194	1467	243	1904
		How do you think the degree of respect for journalists in Chinese society? %	10.2%	77.0%	12.8%	100.0%

**Table 4.** Chi-square test of respect and quit intention

	Value	df	Asymp.Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	93.208 <sup>a</sup>	10	.000
Likelihood Ratio	79.920	10	.000
Linear-by-linear Association	56.006	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	1904		

a. 4 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.43.

The diversity of social evaluation itself is a normal state. Journalists need to pay attention to social evaluation, and be good at drawing nutrients from that, firm belief, regain sense of honor, and shape better professional identity. More importantly, they should establish a relationship between social evaluation and self-evaluation.

The change of the media environment, the factors of news system and mechanism, the attributes of the media are all important factors that lead to the decline of social evaluation for journalists. In the past, some news events reported by the media can cause people to actively participate in the practice of

promoting social progress, but now news rarely causes such a sensation. Social evaluation and influence of journalists are declining, a large number of old journalists also began to leave the media industry. (Respondent No. 9) In addition, because of the nature of media work itself, the attention is naturally higher than that of other occupations. People had too many expectations and requirements for journalists, such social evaluation of journalists was inevitable. (Respondent No. 10)

When 'blame' and 'reputation' are very differentiated, it shows that there is a gap between public expectations and reality. (Respondent No. 22) This evaluation puts more pressure on journalists' professional identity. (Respondent No. 14) Only by better completing work can we win respect from others. (Respondent 21)

The change of social evaluation is a manifestation of social progress and a normal experience of media development. (Respondent No.22) It is undeniable that journalists have made great contributions to this self-awareness, democracy and openness, which is their professional pursuit.

Journalists' social evaluation tends to be rational, objective and comprehensive in comparison. (Respondent No.19). As a communicator, how do you make sense if you don't agree that your job is meaningful?

To form a good atmosphere in the whole society, the public should evaluate journalists with a fair attitude, neither excessively elevate the role of journalists, endow them with too much expectations and abilities, nor overcriticize them.

After all, journalists have become an indispensable profession in modern civilized society. Serving the public is the most basic and important responsibility of journalists and promoting the progress and development of human society is the duty of journalists.

Social evaluation will become more tolerant and objective under rational guidance. The changes of social evaluation and the relationship between media reporters and the public require more professional media reporters.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Journalist social evaluation has obvious polarization tendency, and the overall social evaluation has a downward trend, which is worrying. In addition, self-evaluation also presented a tendency of self-derogatory, journalists showed unprecedented anxiety and confusion, swinging hard between the position of professional role and social role. However, the diversity of social evaluation was quite normal. Through various comparisons and discriminations, journalists gradually got rid of the superstition and excessive expectations, which to a certain extent reduced the pressure on the role of journalists.

Self-professional identity and social evaluation are two important dimensions of social reputation. The higher the social evaluation, the higher the professional identity. On the contrary, only firm self-evaluation will not cause the inner identity confusion due to the external evaluation and

temptation. The improvement of self-evaluation helps to reverse social evaluation through one's own actual actions. In the overall interaction of news concept, discourse and time, media criticism from society and industry has become the realization way for journalists to maintain professional norms and guide professional identity. Through fierce games and dialogues between the parties, journalists can take the initiative to isolate bad behaviors, which helps better coordinate their own status, establish and share unified professional norms, and thus build professional authority to deepen professional identity.[7]Journalists should strengthen professional identity, regain sense of honor, and face up to social evaluation while trying to do their job well.

In short, the formation of journalists' professional identity is an interactive process of individual cognition and social shaping, that is, on the one hand, it comes from their constant recognition of self-role and professional identity in journalism, on the other hand, it also comes from the social identity of others and society to journalism.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

Funding: National Social Science Foundation of China (National Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences) Research on the role orientation and value reconstruction of journalists in the age of artificial intelligence (18CXW008)

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