Call for Papers: Special Issue of *Global Media and China*

AI and its Environmental and Labor Implications: China and Beyond

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Overview

Artificial intelligence (AI) is driving profound transformations across global media and industries, but it also brings significant environmental and labour challenges.

Training and deploying large AI models demand massive computational power and energy, which raises concerns about carbon footprints, electronic waste, and sustainability. For instance, data centres in China—a leading AI powerhouse—are projected to triple their electricity consumption by 2030 (to as much as 600 TWh), with associated emissions of roughly 200 million tonnes of CO_2.

Meanwhile, AI's rapid development depends on extensive human labour, from mining minerals for hardware to the armies of data annotators who label images or moderate content to data centre workers, many of whom are trapped in precarious contracts. Much of this labour remains hidden and precarious. The development of AI has been associated with "algorithmic oppression," which renders gig workers in China and other countries increasingly vulnerable.

In the context of China's rapidly expanding digital economy, these interconnected environmental and labour issues raise urgent questions for media and communication scholars. In the broader global landscape, China's tech sector serves as both a critical case study and a point of contrast. There is an urgent need to investigate the ways in which the growth of AI is influenced by and contributes to existing structures of inequality, as well as the ways in which various societies (including China) are responding to ensure a sustainable and just digital future.

This special issue will examine the environmental and labour implications of AI from an interdisciplinary perspective, focusing on China while comparing global trends. We seek to elucidate the intersection of AI with ecological sustainability, energy policy, labour rights, and social justice. We will also investigate how these challenges are articulated and addressed in media and public discourse. Specifically, contributors to this special issue are invited to address the following themes:

- AI governance and regulation in relation to environmental sustainability and labour protections

- Power dynamics and labour practices in the AI industry (China or comparative studies)

- The environmental impacts of AI and digital media infrastructure

- The role of media, communication, and public discourse in shaping perceptions and responses to AI's environmental and labour issues

The above list is illustrative; authors are welcome to propose other relevant topics that align with the special issue's theme. All submissions need to follow *Global Media and China*'s [submission guidelines](#).

This issue accepts both "original articles" (normally not exceeding 8,000 words including notes and references) and "commentaries" (no longer than 5,000 words). We are particularly interested in submissions that engage in conversations with one another and provoke thoughts on emerging issues related to the special issue theme.

Note: Contributors may be asked to peer-review other submissions to the special issue to facilitate timely review.

Timeline

- Deadline for abstracts: **October 15th, 2025**
- After acceptance (to be communicated with authors by October 31st, 2025), authors will be asked to submit their full manuscripts by January 15, 2026.
- All submissions will go through an initial check by the editors, and then send out for double-blind peer-review.
- We aim for publishing all accepted manuscripts by December 31st, 2026.