

Initium Media Wins 10 SOPA Awards for Editorial Excellence

With 11 nominations, Initium Media won 10 awards as the biggest winner among all the participating media. Please support us to finish the next story.



Balkan Route is one of the most active migrant routes in the EU. Many migrants walk along the railway tracks at sunset. Photo: Darko Bandic/AP/TPG

The Society of Publishers in Asia (SOPA) announced the winners of the SOPA 2025 Awards for Editorial Excellence on 26 June. Initium Media, with 11 nominations, eventually won 10 awards as the biggest winner among all the participating media.

- From Divorce to Home: A Hong Kong Lesbian Couple’s Journey to Their LGBT Wedding wins Honorable Mention for Excellence in Reporting on Women’s Issues
- Unfinished Line: Unsung Stories of Chinese Leaving Their Homeland wins Award for Excellence in Audio Reporting
- Chinese Fighting for Russia: Money, Thrill, and Becoming Influencers wins Award for Excellence in Feature Writing
- Frontiers of AI: Censorship, Vanishing Languages, and Invisible Labor wins Honorable Mention for Excellence in Technology Reporting
- Records of the Biggest National Security Trial: Court Coverage of the Hong Kong 47 wins Award for Excellence in Explanatory Reporting
- Zhuhai Random Attack Report Series wins Award for Excellence in Reporting Breaking News
- Sinking China wins Honorable Mention for Excellence in Reporting on the Environment
- Hualien Earthquake: Disaster and Rebirth wins Award for Excellence in Photography
- Chinese Fighting for Russia: Money, Thrill, and Becoming Influencers wins Honorable Mention in the Scoop Award
- Walk the Line, the Journey Continues wins the Carlos Tejada Award for Excellence in Investigative Reporting

In addition, our participation in the Internews’ Earth Journalism Network’s crossborder collaborative reporting series ‘Ground Truths: A Collaborative Special Report on Soil in Asia’ won a Honorable Mention for Excellence in Reporting on the Environment in the

Regional/Local category. (‘Sinking China’ from the same reporting series published on the Initium also won the SOPA Award)

Also, our reporting series ‘Cattle Hustle’ collaborated with ‘Mekong Eye,’ won the Carlos Tejada Award for Excellence in Investigative Reporting. (‘From Southeast Asia to China, How Far Does a Cattle Travel’ from the same reporting series published on the Initium)

The awards span 21 categories, including women’ s rights, investigative reporting, photography and business reporting. About 120 former and current journalists, and journalism scholars from around the world served as judges. SOPA received more than 700 entries in English, Chinese, and for the separate Indonesian category, from global, regional and local Chinese media outlets.

The Society of Publishers in Asia (SOPA) is a Hong Kong-based not-for-profit organisation that was founded in 1982 to champion freedom of press and promote excellence in journalism in the Asia-Pacific region. This year marks the 27th consecutive annual SOPA awards. The awards recognise excellence in magazines, news agencies, and online publications in the Asia-Pacific region and are regarded as the most prestigious awards in the publishing industry in the region.



Jason Chan was invited to perform the song ‘Love as Ever’ for the newly-weds. When it comes to what is ‘love’, Daisy and Dark think it is ‘communication, tolerance, trust and security.’ Photo: Lam Chun Tung/Initium Media

Introduction of the Winning Entries

From Divorce to Home: A Hong Kong Lesbian Couple’ s Journey to Their LGBT Wedding - Award for Excellence in Reporting on Women’ s Issues

Same-sex marriage is still not leaglised in Hong Kong, with the Court of Final Appeal ruling in 2023 that the government has until October 2025 at the latest to establish an alternative framework for for sams-sex couple relationships. During the Pride Month in June 2024, the Initium covered Hong Kong’ s first large-scale and diverse pride wedding, which sponsored 10 couples of diverse genders and sexual orientations to register for same-sex marriages in the U.S. online, with the ages of the participants spanning from the 20s to the 60s. The

report interviewed one of the lesbian couples and recorded their story from meeting, falling in love to getting married.



15 May 2024. Jacumba Hot Springs, California. Migrants (mostly from China) surrender to border patrol officers after entering the United States from Mexico. Photo: Adrees Latif/Reuters/TPG

Unfinished Line: Unsung Stories of Chinese Leaving Their Homeland - **Award for Excellence in Audio Reporting**

Since 2022, ‘walk the line’ has become a keyword that cannot be ignored when talking about the wave of Chinese migrants. Ten of thousands of Chinese have travelled through the rainforests of Central America, endured all kinds of dangers, and arrived at the border between the United States and Mexico, then crossed into the United States. In this way, they are seeking a new way out of life and possibilities.

‘Unfinished Line’ is an audio series of reporting introduced by the Initium’s news podcast ‘Initium Reports.’ Through the newly discovered ‘walk the line’ stories, it presents the phenomena and changes, while trying to answer where ‘walk the line’ is going, and what it means to the migrants, as well as to the relationship between China and the world.



Dafu Li and his teammates pose in front of an armoured car.

Chinese Fighting for Russia: Money, Thrill, and Becoming Influencers - **Award for Excellence in Feature Writing - the Scoop Award**

At the end of 2023, the news of the death of Zhao Rui, a young man from Chongqing, on the battlefield in the war between Russia and Ukraine, revealed the Chinese mercenaries serving in the Russian army as an active but stealthy community on the internet. Who were they? Why did they travel to Russia to join a war that was far from just? We approached this topic with the aforementioned questions. Since there is hardly any research on this group of people by any organisation or scholar, and no insightful media coverage of them, we could not find any valid material to refer to. In order to do so, our journalists spent nearly a year gathering information online. We contacted all the Chinese mercenaries we found on social media platforms, followed their accounts for a long time, joined their fanbase, and dug out a great deal of information about this group through daily data collection and interview breakthroughs.



Frontiers of AI: Censorship, Vanishing Languages, and Invisible Labor - Award for Excellence in Technology Reporting

- ‘Chinese Generative AI: Beyond Audit, A List of Troubles for Tech Companies’
- ‘When ChatGPT's Cantonese “Speaks Poorly” : In the Age of AI, Are Low-Resource Languages Doomed to Be Marginalised?’
- ‘The \$20-an-hour “swot gigs” Behind Artificial Intelligence’

The age of Artificial Intelligence is an ongoing era, but while AI is moving forward, many of the side-effects of AI's development are yet to be uncovered and written about, and it is these stories that the Initiative's “The Boundaries of AI” series is exploring: How will AI tools mould human society? How will the topics we've been tracking, such as censorship, the demise of language, and labour, be transformed by technology?



Illustration: Wilson Tsang

Records of the Biggest National Security Trial: Court Coverage of the Hong Kong 47 - Award for Excellence in Explanatory Reporting

- ‘Democracy or Subversion? Hong Kong’ s Biggest National Security Case: A Collection of Testimonies from the Case of Hong Kong 47’
- ‘[Interactive Data] Sentencing Hong Kong 47: Role, Guilty Plea, Testimony, Party Affiliation… Which Variable is the Most Effective?’
- ‘Court Reporter on covering Hong Kong 47: When Justice Punch You in the Face, the Recorder is Walking on Thin Ice’

The Pro-Democracy Primary Election Case (Hong Kong 47), is the largest detention and prosecution case in Hong Kong’ s civil society, with far-reaching impacts on the development of the society, and is also an important reference to reflect the new situation in the judicial system. November 2024, after three years and eight months, the case arrived at the sentencing stage. The Initiative has been tracking and reporting the case for a long time, with three reports to form the report series ‘Records of the Biggest National Security Trial: Court Coverage of the Hong Kong 47’ , which attempts to leave behind historical materials for future reflection and analysis.



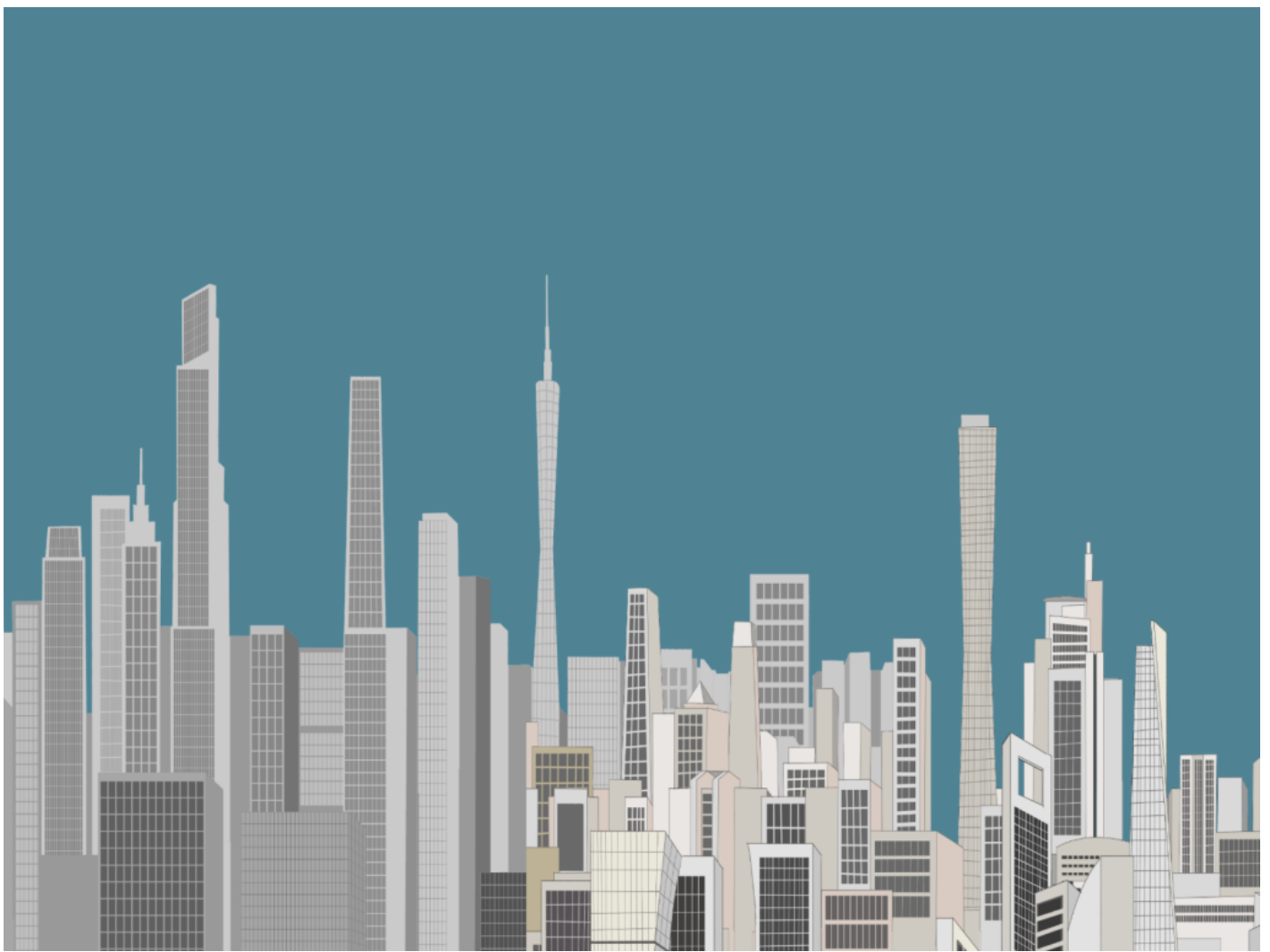
November 12, 2024. Flowers and candles are laid at the entrance to the Zhuhai Sports Centre in China for the victims of a car crash. Photo: Alex Plavevski/EPA/TPG

Zhuhai Random Attack Report Series - **Award for Excellence in Reporting Breaking News**

- ‘Aftermath of Zhuhai Car Attack: What is the Route of the Vehicle? What did the Residents and Witnesses See?’
- ‘A Week in Zhuhai After the Car Attack: How was the Focus Shifted?’
- ‘The Silenced Casualties After the Zhuhai Car Attack’

The Zhuhai car attack in November 2024 was the largest indiscriminate attack with mass casualties in China in recent years. The rapid information censorship by the authorities and the disclosure of some information about the perpetrators without trial, have led to a huge shift in public opinion.

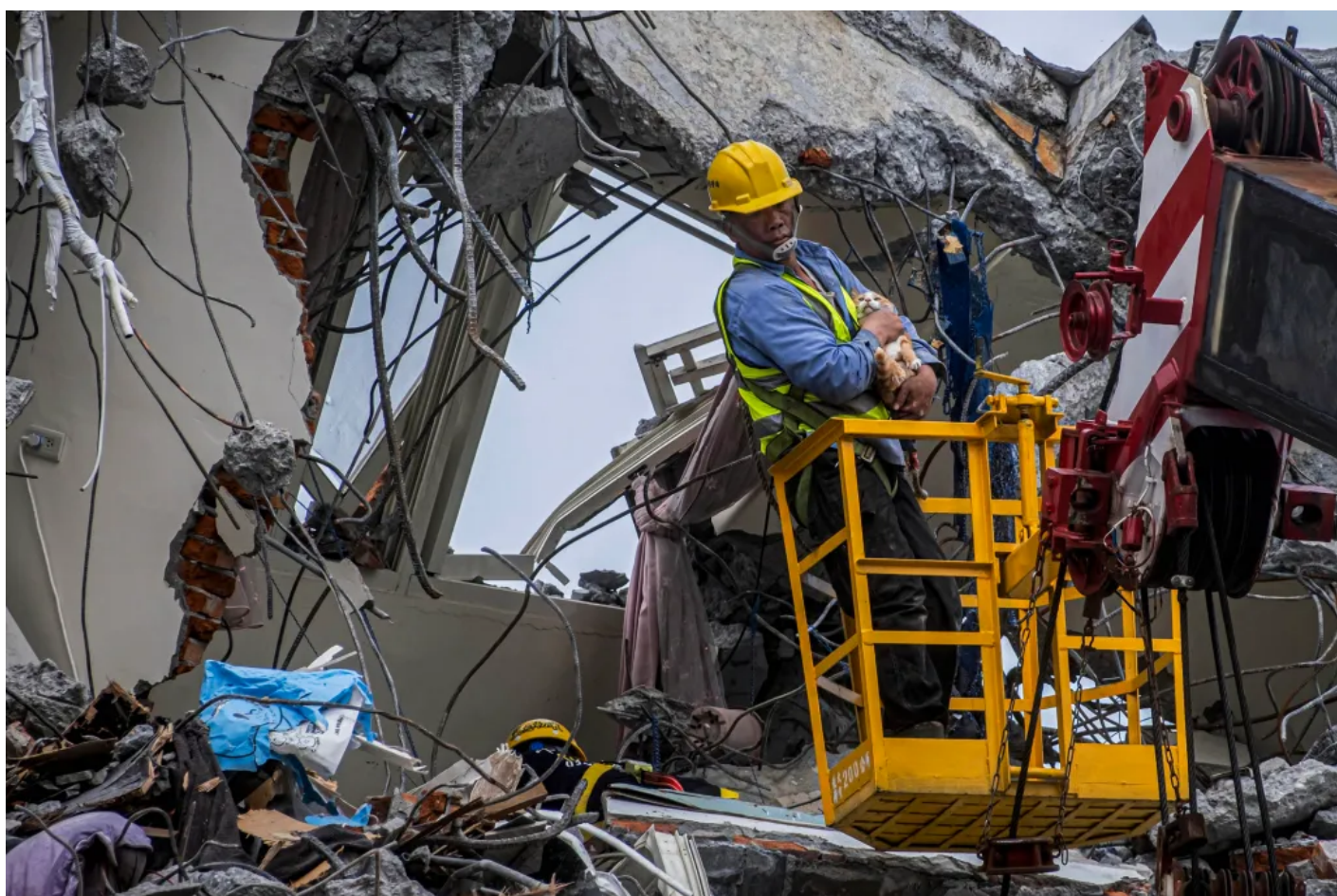
The search for the truth has been difficult. How did the incident happen? What kind of social undercurrents have been revealed behind the scene? What impact did the incident have on the families of the casualties and the local resident? With these questions in mind, the Initium followed the story in the first instance.



Sinking China - Award for Excellence in Reporting on the Environment

Land subsidence is a chronic, long-term land problem that is being faced by the whole world, and is working in tandem with ‘sea level rise’ in the era of climate change. A recent study published in the journal ‘Science’ in April 2024 by the Chinese academia reveals a rare panorama of land subsidence in China, stating that 16 percent of China’s major cities are losing more than 10 millimetres of elevation per year, and nearly half of them are losing more than three millimetres of elevation per year. Among these cities, Tianjin has become the city with the fastest rate of subsidence in Asia, which is a striking problem.

The interactive page starts with popular science and ends with explanatory analysis. Based on the latest report on “Science” journal, it introduces the concept of land subsidence and translates the scientific and academic language into concise data that can be read by the public, explaining the relationship between subsidence and groundwater mining, population, urbanisation, and so on. It subsequently explores the hidden concerns under climate change, and integrates China’s restoration measures and management effectiveness through data analysis and interviews with scholars.



13 April 2024. Hualien. Engineers rescued a cat from the Uranus Building under demolition. The building collapsed after the 403 Earthquake, scattering the residents and leaving a few cats in the building. Photo: Chan Cheuk Fai/Initium Media

Hualien Earthquake: Disaster and Rebirth - **Award for Excellence in Photography**

On 3 April 2024, a strong 7.2 magnitude earthquake struck off the open waters near Hualien County of Taiwan at 7:58 am. Strong tremors were felt throughout the Island. The quake was the strongest to hit Taiwan since the 921 Earthquake in 1999. The epicenter is located 25 kilometres south-south-east of the Hualien County government in the eastern sea, at a depth of 15.5 kilometres, making it a shallow earthquake.

Our photographer rushed to the scene after the earthquake to capture the downtown and aftermath of the landslides, documenting the landscape of the natural disaster, and also capturing the vulnerability of the victims and their care for each other. The photographer also waited at the disaster scene to witness the moment of animals being rescued, and followed the strong aftershocks in Hualien, as a testimony of the post-quake recovery.



On April 5, 2023, migrants from China are smuggled across the Rio Grande from Mexico to the United States through dense scrubland. Photo: Reuters/TPG

Walk the Line, the Journey Continues - Award for Excellence in Investigative Reporting

- ‘Chinese Migrants Who “Walk the Line” Buried on Mexican Coast: Who Were They? Why the Dangerous Waterway?’
- ‘LGBTQ Chinese Migrants Who “Walk the Line” : If You Want to Be True to Yourself, You Have to Hide in the Closet’
- ‘ “Walk the Line” in Europe: Low Cost, Great Benefits? Chinese Migrants Who Choose to “Run to Europe” ’

Through exclusive investigations and first-hand interviews, this series provides an in-depth analysis of the smuggling wave by Chinese migrants who ‘walk the line’ across America and Europe, showing the multiple pathways and group identities of the mass migration. Unlike previous reports, these three articles not only confirm the identity of Chinese migrants who died in the Mexican maritime disaster, but also focus on the unique plight of the LGBTQ migrants, and reveal how Chinese migrants choose Europe as their new smuggling destination.

This collection of articles not only documents the latest developments in the phenomenon of ‘walk the line’ , but also fills in the gaps in the existing discourse by digging deeper into the choices, risks, and social structures behind this migration from the perspective of individuals.

[SOPA 2025 Awards Full List of Winners](#)