

theepochtimes.com

The website of The Epoch Times, a conservative newspaper founded by members of a spiritual group persecuted in China that has promoted misleading claims to advance an undisclosed political agenda.

Ownership and Financing

The Epoch Times is published by the nonprofit The Epoch Times Association, Inc., and is part of the privately held Epoch Media Group, a news and entertainment company founded and owned by entrepreneur John Tang. The paper has been associated with Falun Gong, a spiritual practice that has been banned in China.

The Epoch Times began in 2000 as a Chinese-language newspaper in Tang's basement when he lived in Atlanta, Georgia, the company says. The enterprise has grown to host websites in 21 languages in 35 countries, according to the site. Print editions are published in eight of those languages: Chinese, English, Spanish, Hebrew, Vietnamese, Japanese, Korean, and Indonesian.

The site's funding primarily comes from sponsorships and advertisements, Jan Jekielek, senior editor at The Epoch Times, told NewsGuard. The website also has a Donate page, where readers can make contributions.

The Epoch Times publishes print editions Monday through Friday in New York City and Washington, and a weekly edition that is sold nationally.

Content

TheEpochTimes.com divides content into sections including U.S., Politics, China, World, Opinion, Business, and Science, as well as Food, Arts, and Entertainment. The website also offers a Beyond Science section, with stories about the paranormal, such as visions of the future, exorcism, and the afterlife.

The site covers China extensively, with articles ranging from the state of U.S.-China trade relations to a report on animals in China that are "being eaten to extinction." The site also reports on the treatment of the Falun Gong and other minorities in China, including Uyghur Muslims, who have faced persecution in China's Xinjiang region, according to human rights groups.

Typical headlines on the site have included "US State Department Concerned Over Chinese Threats To Quell Hong Kong Protests Using Military," "Former MSNBC Host Blasts Network for Pushing 'Feverish Russian Conspiracy' Narrative," and "Young Conservatives at Turning Point: We're Being Censored."

Credibility

Epoch Times' news articles rely on a mix of original reporting by the site's staff and articles drawn from other sources, including Reuters, The Associated Press, and Bloomberg. The site also frequently runs content, with credit, from conservative news site The Daily Caller.

However, news and opinion articles published on TheEpochTimes.com have frequently included distorted, misleading, or unsubstantiated claims.

For example, the site has repeatedly asserted that Russian hackers did not steal emails from the Democratic National Committee. A July 2019 opinion article, titled "The Mueller Investigation Failed to Provide Evidence That the DNC Was Actually Hacked," stated that DNC emails were stolen not by Russian hackers but instead "by someone who had physical access to the network." The article also stated, without citing evidence, that "even if there was a hack (the only available evidence shows there wasn't), the CIA could have easily been behind it and left false digital footprints that blamed Russia." A March 2019 article titled "The Big Lie About 'Russian' 'Hacking'" stated that the emails taken from the DNC were the result of "an internal leak, not an outside hack."

Although President Trump has sought to raise doubts that Russia was behind the 2016 hacks, the U.S. Intelligence Community has repeatedly stated its conclusion that Russia was responsible. A January 2017 report from the U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence said that Russian intelligence had access to the DNC networks from July 2015 through at least June 2016, which "resulted in the compromise of the personal email accounts of Democratic Party officials and political figures" that were later released through WikiLeaks.

Additionally, indictments issued as a result of the Mueller probe charged Russian nationals and businesses, including the Internet Research Agency, with hacking into the accounts of leading Democratic organizations and officials, including John Podesta, the campaign chairman for 2016 Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton. The case has not come to trial because those indicted have remained in Russia, beyond the reach of U.S. courts.

An August 2018 story, titled "Sources: China Hacked Hillary Clinton's Private Email Server," first published by the Daily Caller, claimed that an unnamed Chinese company said to be working for the Chinese government hacked Clinton's email server when she was Secretary of State "and obtained nearly all her emails." The claim, which was



Proceed with caution: This website fails to meet several basic standards of credibility and transparency.

Score: 49.5/100

- ✓ **Does not repeatedly publish false content** (22 points)
- ✗ **Gathers and presents information responsibly** (18)
- ✗ **Regularly corrects or clarifies errors** (12.5)
- ✗ **Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly** (12.5)
- ✓ **Avoids deceptive headlines** (10)
- ✗ **Website discloses ownership and financing** (7.5)
- ✓ **Clearly labels advertising** (7.5)
- ✓ **Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest** (5)
- ✓ **The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information** (5)

Criteria are listed in order of importance. [More information.](#)

attributed to two anonymous sources, was quickly denied by the FBI, which stated that the agency "has not found any evidence the servers were compromised." A U.S. Senate report issued in August 2019 also found no evidence China had hacked Clinton's email server.

Jasper Fakkert, editor-in-chief of The Epoch Times' U.S. editions, defended this article in an August 2019 email to NewsGuard, by referencing an earlier article, published by Epoch Times in June 2018, in which Texas Rep. Louie Gohmert also claimed China had hacked Clinton's server. "The article featuring Rep. Louie Gohmert accurately reported the statements made by the Congressman about China getting Hillary Clinton's emails," Fakkert said. "Gohmert's office told The Epoch Times that the evidence of his claim is classified."

Fakkert also disputed the wording of the FBI statement, telling NewsGuard in an August 2019 email that "the FBI did not say ... that 'there is no evidence Clinton's email server was compromised.'" (The FBI's actual statement read, "The FBI has not found any evidence the servers were compromised.")

The Epoch Times has also published opinion articles from anti-vaccination groups that contain false claims about vaccine safety. For example, an April 2019 article headlined "Long-Term Consequences of Mumps Vaccination: Many Unanswered Questions" claimed, without citing evidence, that the "mumps vaccination undeniably increases reproductive-age individuals' risk of mumps infection." The article was credited to Children's Health Defense, an anti-vaccine advocacy organization chaired by Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, two doses of the mumps vaccine are 88 percent effective at preventing mumps. CDC noted that Mumps outbreaks among the vaccinated can still occur "in settings where people have close, prolonged contact," such as universities. There is no evidence to back the claim that the mumps vaccination increases an individual's risk of infection.

Asked about this article, Fakkert said that the claim that the mumps vaccine "undeniably increases reproductive-age individuals' risk of mumps infection" was supported by another Children's Health Defense article that was not published on TheEpochTimes.com. After NewsGuard's inquiry, the site added links to two studies that Fakkert said the author of the other article "used to support his claim." However, a NewsGuard review found that neither study found that receiving the mumps vaccine would increase a person's risk of contracting mumps.

Following the August 2019 whistleblower complaint that sparked the impeachment inquiry into President Trump, TheEpochTimes.com published multiple stories with incorrect claims about the process for intelligence community whistleblowers to file a complaint. The articles claimed that a requirement of firsthand knowledge about the alleged wrongdoing was eliminated for whistleblowers, to clear the way for the complaint against President Trump to be filed.

In an October 2019 column, a writer falsely stated that "They needed a 'whistleblower' complaint, and quick. They needed to change the rules around to see to it that such complaints accept hearsay, as opposed to first-hand knowledge exclusively." In another column from the same month, a writer stated "Previously, firsthand knowledge was an absolute requirement." Both statements are false. No rules were changed, and whistleblowers have never been required to present, "exclusively" or as an "absolute requirement," firsthand knowledge.

Although it is true that edits were made to the form used by whistleblowers to file complaints, these changes did not alter the rules governing who could file complaints, or the evidence required to do so. Firsthand knowledge has never been a standard of evidence required of whistleblowers. After Epoch Times and other conservative sites wrote about the supposedly politically motivated change, the Inspector General of the Intelligence Community issued a statement clarifying that the standards governing who could file a complaint had not changed. Yet Epoch Times did not correct or update its articles.

The Epoch Times has also promoted unfounded conspiracy theories about 5G cell phone networks. For example, a February 2019 commentary article titled "The Threat 5G Poses to Human Health" began by describing a scene where "150 dead birds lay sprawled on the ground, fallen out of trees in a park in The Hague, Netherlands," stating that "the culprit stood atop a nearby train station—a mast with new 5G network antennas. The test of the telecom system failed in more ways than imagined."

In fact, while a large number of birds were found dead in a park near The Hague in October 2018, no tests of the 5G network were being conducted in that area at the time, according to reporting from Snopes.com and UK fact-checking charity FullFact.org.

A 2011 report by the World Health Organization International Agency for Research on Cancer did classify cell phones as a "Class 2B carcinogen," but such a classification poses the same cancer risk as pickles and aloe vera. No studies have addressed the risks of the emerging 5G technology. The American Cancer Society said in a 2018 post on its website: "Most lab studies done so far have supported the idea that RF [radiofrequency] waves don't have enough energy to damage DNA directly. Because of this, it's not clear how RF radiation might be able to cause cancer."

In early 2020, TheEpochTimes.com published opinion stories that promoted the claim that the COVID-19 virus originated in a lab. A February 2020 article titled "Scientific Puzzles Surrounding the Wuhan Novel Coronavirus," concluded that, "Based on recently published scientific papers, this new coronavirus has unprecedented virologic features that suggest genetic engineering may have been involved in its creation."

The article also cited a study that claimed to have found proteins in the virus that are

similar to those found in human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) — suggesting that the virus was manufactured. This study was published on bioRxiv, which publishes scientific studies before they have undergone peer review, and was withdrawn by its authors two days after it appeared on the site.

According to a February 2019 article on the fact-checking website HealthFeedback.org, the study's conclusion that there is a similarity between the COVID-19 virus and human HIV "was detected using extremely short protein sequences, a practice that often gives rise to false positive results." Those same sequences are found in many other organisms, HealthFeedback.org said.

There is no reliable evidence that the COVID-19 virus was engineered. A February 2020 study published in the journal Nature found that the COVID-19 virus is "96% percent identical at the whole-genome level to a bat coronavirus." In a February 2020 report, the World Health Organization said that researchers have linked the COVID-19 virus to similar coronaviruses in bats.

Another February 2020 article, republished from GreenMedInfo.com and titled "Natural Protection Strategy Against Viruses, Including the Coronavirus," included colloidal silver as one of its recommended remedies for the COVID-19 virus. "The best defense against swine flu, bird flu or the new coronavirus may be a few teaspoons of silver every day," the article stated.

Colloidal silver is a liquid product containing silver particles. The National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, part of the U.S. National Institutes of Health, says on its website that "scientific evidence doesn't support the use of colloidal silver dietary supplements for any disease or condition." In a February 2020 article by The Associated Press, NCCIH director Helene Langevin said, "There are no complementary products, such as colloidal silver or herbal remedies, that have been proven effective in preventing or treating this disease (COVID-19), and colloidal silver can have serious side effects."

Fakkert did not respond to an email from NewsGuard in March 2020 inquiring about the site's claims related to the COVID-19 virus.

Because The Epoch Times has published numerous articles that advance misleading or discredited claims, NewsGuard has determined the site fails to gather and present information responsibly and fails to avoid deceptive headlines.

Fakkert disputed NewsGuard's determination. "The Epoch Times was founded based on a fundamental belief in the value of a free and independent press—it is at the core of what we are about," he said in an email. "While we have communicated in good faith with NewsGuard's editors over the past year, we have come to question the impartiality of NewsGuard's methodology."

The Epoch Times posts a corrections policy on the site's Contact Us page, stating that if errors are found, "a correction notice will be published online and in print, depending on where the error appeared." NewsGuard found that the site regularly publishes corrections, typically in the form of a note at the top or bottom of the article.

However, the site has neglected to correct the false claims in the articles cited above, and NewsGuard found numerous instances of significant factual errors that were only corrected long after publication, when NewsGuard asked about them.

For example, The Epoch Times published a May 2017 article based on a Fox News report saying that DNC staffer Seth Rich "shared Democrat emails with information leaking website WikiLeaks shortly before he was found murdered."

There is no evidence Rich leaked DNC emails to WikiLeaks. According to Mueller's report, not only were Russian hackers the source for the DNC files, but Rich had died four days before WikiLeaks received the emails. A July 2019 report from Yahoo News says that the conspiracy theory about Rich's murder originated with Russia's foreign intelligence service, seeking to deflect blame from Russia.

Fox retracted its story in 2017 and issued a statement a week after it was published, explaining that the article did not meet its editorial standards. The Epoch Times' article was not corrected until Aug. 9, 2019, after NewsGuard asked about it.

In another example, in a December 2018 article, the site reported that former U.S. President Barack Obama had built a 10-foot wall around his house in Washington. Epoch Times cited a tweet by US President Donald Trump making the claim about Obama's wall — part of President Trump's argument that the U.S. needs a wall on the Mexico border — but neglected to mention that The Washington Post had found that there is no wall around the Obamas' home, just some fencing.

After being contacted by NewsGuard in August 2019, The Epoch Times corrected the article, adding a correction notice stating that the article was updated to "reflect that the structure surrounding the home of the Obama family is a fence, rather than a wall."

A July 2019 article originally titled "Mueller Will Testify Before Congress; Still No Evidence of Russian Interference," previewing former U.S. Special Counsel Robert Mueller's testimony before Congress, quoted Epoch Times' senior political editor Ivan Pentchoukov saying that "there was still no evidence of Russian interference" in the 2016 presidential election. He went on to state that "the government has not been able yet to establish that Russia was connected to the social media firms to interfere in the election."

A two-year investigation by Mueller into Russian influence over the presidential election led to indictments charging 12 Russian nationals with launching a disinformation campaign on social media to influence the U.S. election. A July 2019 report from the Senate Intelligence Committee, released the day after The Epoch Times was published, found that the Russian government dedicated extensive

Epoch Times story was published, found that the Russian government "directed extensive activity" against election infrastructure in the U.S. from 2014 through 2017.

After NewsGuard asked about this article in August 2019, it was corrected and the headline was changed to "Former Special Counsel Mueller to Testify Before Congress."

Because numerous articles with false claims remain on the site uncorrected and significant errors have gone uncorrected until long after publication and only after NewsGuard asked about them, NewsGuard has determined that The Epoch Times fails to meet the criteria for having an effective corrections policy.

Said Fakkert: "The Epoch Times makes corrections when made aware that a story contains an error."

On the About Us page, The Epoch Times states, "We are nonpartisan and dedicated to truthful reporting." The same page discloses the site's perspective on covering communist China, saying it was founded "in response to communist repression and censorship in China."

However, The Epoch Times does not disclose its perspective more broadly, and its coverage skews conservative, often presenting President Trump and his policies in a favorable light without mentioning any opposing view.

For example, a January 2020 article, titled "Trump Administration Defends Constitutional Prayer and Religious Liberty in Schools," only quoted sources praising President Trump's support of students' right to pray in public schools. No one criticizing Trump's position or opposing prayer in public schools was quoted in the story.

Another January 2020 article, headlined "Trump Admin to Roll Back School Meal Standards on Vegetables, Fruits," pertained to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's proposed new rules allowing for fewer fruit and vegetables in school lunches. The article described the existing standards put in place by the Obama administration as having "long been a source of controversy," and presented only the Trump administration's defense for the change. No statements critical of the proposed rule were included in the story.

Similarly, a December 2019 article, titled "Trump Credits Deregulation As Driver of Economic Success," only included statements from the White House and President Trump himself praising the administration's deregulatory agenda. No opposing viewpoint was offered in the article, which concluded, "Given the administration's ambitious Fall Unified Agenda, which is projected to lead to nearly \$52 billion in additional savings in the fiscal year 2020 alone, deregulatory benefits to consumers, job creators, and the economy are bound to grow more than ever in 2020."

The Epoch Times' support of President Trump extends beyond its coverage. In August 2019, NBC News reported that The Epoch Times had spent more than \$1.5 million on Facebook advertisements in support of President Trump. Only the Trump campaign had spent more during the same six-month period, NBC reported, citing publicly available information from Facebook's Ad Library. The Epoch Times advertisements were often videos that featured the site's pro-Trump coverage, introduced by a written statement urging viewers to subscribe.

In an article published on its site, The Epoch Times defended its advertising practices, stating "The Epoch Times' subscription advertisements have no political agenda. The only reason some of them are run as 'political advertising' is that online platforms require them to be categorized as such." The site called NBC News' representation of its ads "blatantly incorrect" and stated "Without exception, these ads are overtly Epoch Times advertisements for our subscriptions. And there is no secret there, since it's all public."

Because The Epoch Times does not disclose its pro-Trump, conservative perspective, including its financial support for the President's campaign, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

Fakkert did not respond to NewsGuard's January 2020 email seeking comment on its handling of opinion and the stories cited above. In an August 2019 email, he said, "We strongly disagree with NewsGuard's assessment and stand by our reporting which is completely based in facts, which we separate clearly from our robust opinion/commentary offerings."

In 2013, the newspaper won the Society of Professional Journalists' Sigma Delta Chi award for non-deadline reporting for a series about organ harvesting from live victims in China. The paper also won 10 awards for its news and photography coverage in the New York Press Association's 2015 Better Newspaper Contest.

Transparency

TheEpochTimes.com only discloses its ownership by Epoch Times Association Inc. on the site's Terms of Service, which does not meet NewsGuard's standards for a "user-friendly" disclosure.

Asked by NewsGuard in August 2019 about the site's ownership disclosure, Fakkert said he had forwarded NewsGuard's inquiry about the matter "to the relevant team and I understand they will update our About Us page." However, as of January 2020, no information about Epoch Times Association Inc. had been added to the About Us page. Fakkert did not respond to NewsGuard's email in January 2020 asking again about the site's ownership disclosure.

The site's Contact Us page identifies The Epoch Times' editorial leaders and provides their email addresses, along with mailing addresses, email addresses, and telephone numbers for each of its major regional offices.

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Articles are generally credited to their authors, with bylines linking to a page with a short biography and, in most cases, the reporter's Twitter handle. In some cases, no biographical information is provided. Epoch Times senior editor Jan Jekielek told NewsGuard in June 2018 that the publication maintains a degree of privacy because of the danger its Chinese journalists have faced. He said some have been imprisoned or tortured.

Advertising and sponsored content are distinguishable from editorial content.

History

Founder John Tang left China to attend the Georgia Institute of Technology, where he earned a doctoral degree in theoretical physics in the 1990s, according to TheEpochTimes.com and Fakkert. Tang was said to have been galvanized by the 1989 police massacre of protesters in Tiananmen Square, and by the persecution of members of the outlawed Falun Gong spiritual movement. Falun Gong opposes the Chinese government, and the government considers the group a cult.

Tang and a group of Chinese-Americans, including some who were Falun Gong members, established The Epoch Times in 2000. The publication began as a Chinese-language newspaper, adding an English-language website in 2003 and a newspaper in 2004. The Epoch Times is banned in China.

The publication of an Epoch Times series, "Nine Commentaries on the Communist Party," helped spur the creation of "Tuidang," a Chinese dissident movement that means "withdrawal from the [Communist] party." The paper helped fuel the movement by publishing articles of withdrawal.

Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on March 13, 2020, to include content on the site related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier, on Jan. 22, 2020, this label was updated to reflect that NewsGuard has determined that the site does not gather and present information responsibly, consistently correct errors, or disclose its ownership. The criteria checklist has been updated accordingly. The label has also been updated with additional examples of the site's content and new comments from Jasper Fakkert, editor-in-chief of The Epoch Times' U.S. editions.

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Send feedback to NewsGuard: [Click Here](#)

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