

China Correspondents Unmasked: The Stories Behind the Storytellers

Luwei Rose Luqiu

Assignment China: An Oral History of American Journalists in the People's Republic, by Mike Chinoy. New York: Columbia University Press, 2023. 520 pp. US\$35 (Paperback). ISBN: 9780231207997.

There are numerous books written by foreign journalists about China available in the market. Some of these books focus on the daily life and work experiences of journalists who are stationed in China as China correspondents, while others address specific issues in Chinese society. Written during different time periods, these records have become essential resources for understanding China. This is because the profession of journalism enables foreign correspondents to provide first-hand details through on-site observation that are not usually seen in news reports, and these details often piece together a comprehensive picture. As foreign correspondents temporarily residing in China with diverse cultural backgrounds and even ideologies, they can provide different perspectives on observation compared with their Chinese counterparts.

However, to have a deep understanding of China, it is necessary to consider these books written by foreign journalists as a collective body of work. Unfortunately, there are some periods where such books are absent, because not every journalist stationed in China choose to write a book, leaving the stories behind the news forever unknown. Due to this limitation, a particular book becomes very important and special, even

Luwei Rose Luqiu is Associate Professor in the School of Communication, Hong Kong Baptist University. Correspondence should be sent to roseluqiu@hkbu.edu.hk.

ambitious, as the author's goal is to interview American journalists who have covered China for over eight decades and to provide a systematic and comprehensive history of how American journalists have understood and reported China.

This project was a monumental undertaking, but ultimately, the author achieved success. The book encompasses interviews with a total of 115 journalists, whose coverage of China spans from before the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 to the era of China's zero-COVID policy in 2021. In addition to journalists, the author also interviewed Chinese and American diplomats, Chinese affairs experts, and people involved in the China news reported by the American media, such as Chinese dissidents. As a result, the history of the PRC is vividly portrayed through the narratives provided by the interviewees.

The aim of this book is to answer the following questions:

Who were the people who covered China for the American media? How did they collect, understand, and transmit the news? What sort of mental baggage did they bring? What kind of dealings did they have with a Chinese government that was usually hostile, suspicious, and uncooperative? How did they cope with language and cultural differences, and manage relationships with ordinary Chinese citizens with whom they came into contact? What kind of interactions did they have with their editors and bosses? To what extent were they influenced by the policy priorities of the US government? How did the dramatic changes in media technology—from print and radio to television, satellites, the twenty-four-hour news cycle, the Internet, and social media—shape the way they covered China? How accurate was the picture of China they presented? What were some of the consequences of how the country was reported on? (p. 5)

Most of these questions are about how reporting on China is produced. This includes cultural factors such as the language skills of the journalists, technologies like using satellites and social media, and information sources including the relationships between journalists, government officials, and Chinese citizens. All these factors influence the final news reports, affecting the news agenda, reporting angles, and frames, as well as accuracy. In addition, the author also tries to review the impact of American journalists' reporting on China, especially in events related to Sino-US relations. In the United States, the distinct political and media systems allow public opinion to have a substantial impact on foreign policy. This contrasts with China, where public opinion is less influential