

A Chinese perspective on Western coverage of China past and present

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Cheers! Nixon in China

What would a 21st century Chinese media student make of a documentary about Nixon's historic trip to China back in 1972? What would they think of former CNN correspondent Mike Chinoy's view that Nixon colluded with China's propaganda spin? And what they make of the view in [this review of the film](#), that the Chinese government is still locked into that mentality of using the media for its own ends?

LSE media student Yuanyuan Liu gives her view.

Leaving the earth and deep into the cosmos.

This is how CBS anchor Dan Rather described the trip to China covering Nixon's historic visit in 1972 in the documentary *Assignment China*: 'the week that changed the world'. I often call myself an alien as an excuse when I don't quite understand someone in the UK. I realise that in Western people's eyes, the place I am from is that far away, almost another world.

The documentary shows one specific historical media event: President Nixon's visit to China in 1972 from a Western media perspective through interviews with journalist witnesses. As a native Chinese who lived there for almost twenty years and received the majority of education from kindergarten to university, I find the documentary provides a unique angle to view my country through a western lens.

At the time of the visit news anchors on TV in America demonstrated how to use chopsticks to their viewers. One would laugh to tears when watching President Nixon fail to utter any compliment in front of a crowd of journalists after viewing a Chinese ballet which is full of exotic costumes, unfamiliar language, and most importantly, propagandist nationalistic content.

But even in my eyes the ballet seems surreal, bearing the striking mark of that hard, brave, united, but utterly crazy nationalistic era. It is the history my generation are trying to figure out but somehow everything we learn is "staged" just like in the documentary when the American journalists found out the happy lives of the ordinary Chinese people that was put on show for them, was all carefully orchestrated, too.

Crazy People

The film's narrator Mike Chinoy was asked about the parallel between what happened in China then and what is happening now in North Korea. He admitted the parallel but pointed out North Korea is a more extreme case. I have been aware of the parallel but more or less reluctant to admit it as there is always a tiny voice in my mind murmuring: "who wants to be similar to those crazy, poor and isolated people?!" But Mike also made a most important point that it is media that creates the image of North Korea, feeding in the world's mind set – "They are bad". But how true is it? We don't know, so we need to be cautious.

As Mike also mentioned, China is more open now, but this doesn't necessarily mean that the job of foreign journalists in China is easier. Recent years have seen several foreign correspondents from Al Jazeera and the *New York Time* ordered out of China because of their negative coverage of the Communist Party.

Chinese people may appreciate the disclosure of these scandals which would have been covered up in the past. But I believe foreign media is also facing increasing pressure from the Chinese audience who can read the English online news and have negative feedback towards some of their coverage of China. For example, last week [one article](#) from CNN's online news showing sympathy to the perpetrators of Tian'anmen Square car crash and arguing against regarding the incident as a "terrorist attack" infuriated many Chinese citizens.

Whether it is due to Chinese nationalism or the problematic focus of the article, issues like these are a new challenge that foreign journalists will inevitably confront when they start work in this not-that-alien but still geographically and ideologically quite faraway country.

This article by LSE media student Yuanyuan Liu

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