

# Role of Chinese Correspondents in the East Asian Cold War - A Case Study of a Former Reporter of Xinhua News Agency in Japan

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Received April 10, 2022; Revised June 03, 2022; Accepted June 12, 2022

**Abstract** The study attempts to shed light on the role of Chinese correspondents in Sino-Japanese relations during a period of the Cold War. It examines the triple role of Chinese correspondents as reporters, political agents and China's modernizers. The Sino-Japanese journalist exchange of 1964 is one of important parts in promoting the normalization of China and Japan diplomatic relations. As a former Chinese correspondent stationed in Japan, Wu Xuewen witnessed and experienced some milestones in the development of Sino-Japanese relations in the East Asian Cold War. Drawing on the historical materials of archival documents, journalists' memoirs and diaries and news articles, the study summarizes the Chinese correspondents played role in terms of China's international relations and China's domestic reform with "motherland consciousness". Specifically, Chinese correspondents brought opportunities for an improved relationship between China and Japan in the cold war era. Meanwhile, the Chinese correspondents promoted China's social and economic development by introducing advanced experience of Japan. Their reporting practices were affected by the guidance from the media organization as well as the government.

**Keywords:** *foreign correspondents, China, journalistic roles, journalistic practice, foreign policy, Sino-Japanese relations*

**Cite This Article:** Xinhui Zhang, "Role of Chinese Correspondents in the East Asian Cold War - A Case Study of a Former Reporter of Xinhua News Agency in Japan." *World Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2022): 26-31. doi: 10.12691/wjssh-8-1-4.

## 1. Introduction

Since the late 1990s, driven by the demands of the domestic market and the Chinese government's policy of enhancing soft power and discourse power in the world, Chinese media such as Xinhua News Agency and China Central Television, started to send more correspondents abroad and project in their foreign-language programming throughout the world especially in Africa. Scholars' and policy experts' inside and outside China have paid attention to the expansion of China's media abroad and the impact on overseas markets and audiences, as well as domestic media's international news coverage [1-7]. Pál Nyíri claims that the main purpose of expanding foreign correspondent networks for the Chinese central media is to improve China's international status and influence [8]. However, few studies traced the historical roots of this research topic. China's aspirations for global influence is much older, stretching all the way back to the 1950s. In response to the Chinese central government's instruction, Xinhua News Agency began to set up overseas bureaus and send correspondents abroad. The dispatched correspondents played a part in the

establishment of the official relations between China with non-communist countries during the Cold War. Although the scales and ways of Chinese media explored overseas markets nowadays is different from the situation in 1950s, it is meaningful to examine the starting point of Chinese media's international news reporting. This study contributes to the growing study on the Chinese media's international reporting and provides reference for a better understanding of Sino-Japanese relations.

Sino-Japanese relations is important but complex and vulnerable. The complexity of the bilateral relationship is not only originated from the long-term war experience and contemporary confrontation over territorials, but also affected by the history of the two countries belonging to different political blocs in Cold War era. Since China and Japan established an agreement of exchange journalists in 1964, correspondents started to station in the other side for reporting. The correspondents' reporting practices brought more information about the other side and created more opportunities for mutual understanding between these two countries. Therefore, the Sino-Japanese journalist exchange of 1964 was considered as an important step in solidifying relations between China and Japan [9]. Nevertheless, the research on this history has not been given a high degree of academic attention. Records and

examines on this history are mostly in the form of memoirs, symposia and seminar. Casper W. argued the importance of the Sino-Japanese correspondents exchanges in 1964 in the context of Chinese foreign policy and Sino-Japanese relations during the Cold War through illuminating the background of correspondents exchange, specific circumstance of Chinese and Japanese correspondents stationed in the other side country [9]. However, some research questions have not been addressed such as what stories about the other side country the correspondents want to tell domestic audiences, and how their news value are shaped by state policies, institutional pressures and individual perceptions. This study seeks to understand how Chinese correspondents see their work by taking Wu Xuewen's working experience in Xinhua News Agency as a case.

Wu Xuewen was one of the most prominent Japan specialists in China, as well as a former senior correspondent of Chinese media, who sent back the "first telegram" of Xinhua News Agency from Tokyo [10,11]. He started the work related to Japan since the 1950s, was dispatched to Tokyo bureau of Xinhua News Agency from the year of 1979 to 1983, and retired in 1993. During his 40 years of working time, he participated in some important events between China and Japan and witnessed the development of Sino-Japanese relations. After the retirement, he remained committed to the cause of Sino-Japanese friendship. Wu has written down many records related his working experiences, which is of certain research value.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Foreign Correspondents in the Cold War

Foreign correspondents are one of the important research objects in the field of international communication study, because they set the international agenda [12]. As the principal source of information for domestic audiences to understand the world [13], their reporting content influences the formation of external consciousness. By analyzing the correspondents' reporting activities can help us understand the process of international communication.

Previous scholarship on international relations and correspondents during the Cold War primarily focus on the practices of the Capitalist Bloc's correspondents reporting from the Communist Bloc. Dina [14,15,16] explores that affected by different sets of ideological convictions of Soviet Union and American, the correspondents on each side shaped the popular imagination and the political horizons during the Cold War. As symbols of socialist and liberal political systems, the correspondents were involved in the ideological rivalry between of the two superpowers [15]. Drawing on the working experience of six American journalists who were stationed in the Soviet Union during the period of Cold War, Magnúsdóttir argues that obstacles to political integration of two sides are Russian history and Soviet ideology [17]. Beverly outlines the Western correspondents permitted to work in China from 1949 to 1976 [18]. Based on the scholarship above, it can be

inferred that the correspondents were affected deeply by the difference of ideology from the Capitalist Bloc and the Communist Bloc, although some other factors could help to promote the political convergence such as the voices of the public.

Pedersen SB. and Cronqvist M. point out that the Eastern bloc correspondents in the West is still an under-researched theme. They provide detailed insights into Eastern East German television correspondents' practice in the West [19]. They argue that the way of the correspondents to navigate the practical challenges of the different media systems on either side during the Cold War. Much research like above has focused on the foreign correspondents from the western bloc rather than the other side in the Cold War. Focusing on Chinese correspondents reporting practices since 1950s, this study provides a reference to the research on the practices of foreign correspondents from communist country in the period of cold war.

### 2.2. Role Perception of Chinese Correspondents

The analyses focus on Chinese correspondents' role perception explore the identities, news values and practices of Chinese correspondents in post-Cold War era. Zhang indicates that Chinese war correspondents in modern society perceive their complex mix of roles as objective reporter, interpreter, propagandist, and diplomat, as well as propagandists and patriots who need to explain China's policies and stance [20]. Through in-depth interviews in addition to literature review, Zhang and Zhang reveals that Chinese correspondents perceive their roles as a mixture of observer and interpreter, information gatherer as well as diplomat and public diplomacy facilitator [21].

Scholarship has acknowledged the role played by the Asian country, especially China, in the Cold War [22,23,24]. Çağdaş Ü. explores how China carry out foreign propaganda work by strengthening the network of foreign-language broadcast and print media in Mao-era to expand international influence [25]. However, more study on the Chinese correspondents' identities, motivations, values and how the perceptions affect their work in the Cold War need to be explored. Against this backdrop, this study portrays the role of the Chinese correspondents played in the East Asian Cold War era by examining their role perceptions and the impact of state policies and institution guidance.

## 3. Method and Materials

This paper takes Wu Xuewen's news reporting experience in Japan as a case study. It examines the Chinese correspondents reporting practices in Japan in the 1950s to 1980s. Qualitative approach is employed drawing on secondary literatures, memoirs, journalists' handwritten notes, journalistic articles and the and rules and regulations. Also, other relevant materials were used as supplementary. This paper first employs a political-economic perspective to understand the motivation for setting up Tokyo bureau of Xinhua News Agency. This

entails tracing the background of China's international relations, especially the relation with Japan in 1960s. The paper then moves to a textual analysis of content in research material mentioned above to explore how Wu Xuewen perceived his role in reporting and what was the impact of his reporting practices.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Establishment of Tokyo Bureau of Xinhua News Agency and Its Orientation

Before the realization of the exchange of correspondents between China and Japan, Chinese media's news sources for Japan-related reports basically depended on foreign news agencies and research materials. Sometimes, reporters went Japan with the Chinese delegation for temporary reporting or obtained news from the "JAPAN PRESS" (later renamed to TOHO PRESS) [26]. In 1955, in response to the central government's directive of "rule the earth", Xinhua News Agency began to send resident reporters overseas, set up foreign branches and set about building a worldwide news agency [27]. Meanwhile, Chinese government proposed the basic policy of China-Japan Civil Diplomacy of "Civil leading the way and encouraging officials" to improve Sino-Japanese relations [28]. As an important part of implementing this policy, China reached an agreement with Japan on the establishment of LT trade offices and the exchange of journalists in 1964. In this context, the exchange of journalists between China and Japan also marked the establishment of Xinhua News Agency in Tokyo. Since then, Chinese media have expanded the scope of news coverage about Japan by gathering information at local directly. Therefore, the authenticity, objectivity and the reliability of news sources were guaranteed to a certain extent.

Due to the attributes of Chinese media, its international news coverage shows a localized character closely related to politics. In terms of how to report on international issues, the central leadership believes that coverage should be contextual and in-depth, and the correspondents should accumulate extensive knowledge. For example, as early as September 1958, Chairman Mao Zedong issued a special instruction to Xinhua News Agency, stating that "we should study international issues and have certain views, not just hold on to them temporarily and express sentimental opinions". Besides, the leaders of the Central Government also demanded that news reports should be distinguished from internal and external ones. For example, when the former premier Zhou Enlai guided the work of Xinhua News Agency in June 1967, he proposed that "it would not do to rigidly transfer the current practice of domestic reporting to the outside world. The external struggle must not lose its principles, but also has many different features to pay attention to".

With regard to reporting on Japan, according to Wu Xuewen's recollections, the leaders of the central government attached great importance to the Chinese correspondents' reporting practices and were directly involved in guiding the specific reporting work. For example, Liao Chengzhi, who was directly responsible for

the Sino-Japanese diplomatic work in Chinese central government, proposed to "do more research, do more interviews and reports, and do not just copy Japanese newspapers [26]. Liao emphasized the importance of obtaining first-hand information. It means that the reports should be based on objective facts to ensure the authenticity of news.

In addition, the central government leaders also guided how to write a news article personally. When reporting on the visit of the Chinese Red Cross delegation to Japan, Liao instructed that more influential people from all walks of life in Japan should be reported. He personally revised the list of names in the manuscript. This was in accordance with the "civil diplomacy" carried out by the Chinese central government at that time. The policy called for the reporting should focus on the friendly people who supported the restoration of diplomatic relations and promoted the development of Sino-Japanese relations [27].

Additionally, former premier Zhou Enlai reviewed the reporting on the composition of the Tanaka Cabinet in Japan. The editorial office of Xinhua News Agency sent the initial version of the manuscript for review. The full text of this manuscript was less than 100 words, containing only a simple introduction and a partial list of the Japanese cabinet. But it was criticized by Zhou pointing out that the manuscript did not keep up with the situation and omitted important content. Based on Zhou's review comments, the information was added to the manuscript including former prime minister of Japan Tanaka's positive proposals on Sino-Japanese relations and the reactions from the opposition party of Japan [28]. The news article was finally published on July 9, 1972, on page 5 of the *People's Daily* titled "New Japanese Cabinet Formed, Tanaka Kakuei Becomes Prime Minister". By publishing the positive views of the Japanese side on this issue and enriching the background of the news, the news reports were able to show, first of all, that Chinese side valued the statements of the other side and conveyed Chinese side's attitude on the issue. It can be seen that through the news media reports, the Chinese and Japanese governments have exchanged views. The positive and friendly signals conveyed to each other were of great significance to the realization of the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan at that time.

### 4.2. Guidelines for Chinese correspondents by Xinhua News Agency

The media organization's positioning of its role and the criteria for judging news value directly affect the news reporting activities of foreign correspondents. The press system and media cultures defined and influenced how the Chinese correspondents perceive their roles also the media-foreign policy relationships [21].

As early as January 1957, the Xinhua News Agency pointed out that the work of foreign correspondents included "To report all news of national and international significance in the host country accurately and promptly", "To continuously learn and study the situation of the host country and send back internal reference materials frequently" [26]. At the same time, Shen Dingyi, former deputy editor-in-chief of Xinhua News Agency, pointed out that the guiding ideology of Xinhua News Agency for

foreign correspondents and foreign branch offices including “Base on abroad, face domestic, face east, face the world.”, “To learn to report objectively, and to integrate the viewpoint and position with objective facts”, “To seek common ground while shelving differences and strive for a long-term foothold”, “To run Xinhua News Agency with diligence and thrift, raise our vigilance, strictly guard national secrets and resist the erosion of bourgeois ideology” [26]. In addition, Xinhua News Agency held several meetings at different times to discuss and formulate relevant guidelines and regulations to guide and manage foreign news reporting activities. For example, “the Eight Requirements for Strengthening Foreign Branches’ Reporting Work (《关于加强国外分社报道工作的八项要求》)” was formulated in March 1964, “the International Department formulated the Liability System of the International Department on Preventing Errors in News Reporting (《国际部关于防止新闻报道中错误的责任制度》)” on August 2, 1977, and “the Several Opinions on Improving Reporting on International News (《关于改进国际新闻对外报道的若干意见》)” was put forward by the International Department on November 4, 1989.

Besides, in the case of the reporting practices in Japan, Wu Xuewen indicated that the Xinhua News Agency made specific guidance for the Chinese correspondents. The reporting content should highlight four aspects. First, “the public communication and friendship movement between China and Japan”; Second, “supporting the Japanese people in their struggle for peace, democracy and independence; Third, “exposing the Japanese government’s hostility to China and the plot of “two China”; Fourth, “reporting moderately on Japan’s political, economic, social and foreign relations” [26]. Meanwhile, Xinhua News Agency asked the Chinese correspondents stationed in Japan to “pay attention to the complex situation of Sino-Japanese relations, and pay attention to the long-term foothold, so as not to “give people the blame”. It can be seen that based on the guidance of Xinhua News Agency, the Chinese correspondents’ reporting content were selective and biased in order to respond to the central government’s diplomatic policy and to normalize diplomatic relations between China and Japan as soon as possible. Besides, it can be found in the guidance of Xinhua News Agency, the Chinese correspondents was asked to be wary of the countries with political systems different from China’s, reflecting the international situations and the ideological struggle from different blocs in the Cold War era.

In particular, Xinhua News Agency issued several circulars and taken corresponding measures to strengthen economic coverage related to Japan. For example, on August 30, 1979, “the International Department issued “Opinions on Strengthening International Internal Reference and International Economic Coverage (《关于加强国际内参、国际经济等方面报道的意见》)”, requesting all branches abroad to “While continuing and improving the internal reference report on major political and diplomatic events in the host country, we should consciously and gradually strengthen the internal reference report on foreign countries’ science, technology, economy, social

situation and culture, so as to further serve the four modernizations of China.”. On December 8, 1982, the editor-in-chief’s office issued “(Notice on) Strengthening Economic Reporting (《关于加强经济报道》)” to all bureaus abroad, requesting Chinese correspondents to pay close attention to the economic trends in the countries where they are stationed, conduct in-depth and serious research on the economic policies and measures adopted by the governments of various countries, as well as the gains and losses, and write a public report based on the material at hand. On December 13, 1985, the International Department issued the “Notice on Strengthening Economic Reporting (《关于加强经济报道通知》)”, pointing out that it would increase the reporting content of China’s expansion of trade, export earnings and economic trade and technical cooperation, as well as contents that It could be used for reference to the construction of the four modernizations in China [29].

### 4.3. “motherland consciousness” of Chinese Correspondents

The factors of journalist’s personal traits and experiences, and the way how they perceive the professional role and its social function, affect the selection and handling of news reports deeply [1].

The Chinese correspondents who were dispatched to Japan from 1950s to 1980s grew up during the Sino-Japanese War period. In the context of the Sino-Japanese war, they hated and detested Japanese aggression. For example, Wu Xuewen stated that “in order to become one of the gravediggers of Japanese militarism” [10], he studied at The Imperial Japanese Army Academy (陸軍士官学校, Rikugun Shikan Gakkō) from 1942 to 1944. He encouraged himself with the ancient adage to endure hardships to plan retaliation without showing the hatred to Japanese aggression in China whiling studying in the school. He claimed that today’s study is for carrying out national revenge tomorrow [10]. This sentiment was also brought into the news reporting work, as Wu recalled, “When I first started to reporting work, I was often reported from the perspective of warning against the revival of Japanese militarism” [10]. For example, he was extremely disgusted and would correct or criticize it when he noticed someone used words such as “Sina” and “Manchuria”. However, with the improvement of Sino-Japanese relations and the accumulation of work experience in Japan, he understood that the correspondent should look at problems from the perspective of development and not be influenced by stereotypes. To distinguish between friendly people who love peace and those who obstruct the development of Sino-Japanese relations. It is evident that the Chinese correspondents realized that the reporting should adhere to objectivity and not mix subjective feelings into the reporting of news facts.

Besides, the Chinese correspondents considered that they should report with the awareness of serving the country which was called “motherland consciousness”. The “motherland consciousness” was first and foremost reflected in the need to implement the country’s foreign policy in news reporting. According to Wu Xuewen’s

recollection, “I had to observe and analyze the changes in the situation and understand the policies when I write political news. For example, before accompanying former General Secretary of Communist Party of China Hu Yaobang to Japan, Wu had already made it clear that the theme of the visit to Japan was “seeking friendship and knowledge” [26]. Based on this theme, Wu published some news articles such as the news articles titled “It’s a basic policy to devote ourselves to the ‘four modernizations’ and ‘two civilizations’ wholeheartedly” (*People’s Daily*, Nov. 26, 1983, Front page), “It is the common wish of the Chinese and Japanese people to continue friendship for generations” (*People’s Daily*, Nov. 27, 1983, Front page) and “The Japanese government highly appreciates the results of Hu Yaobang’s visit to Japan” (*People’s Daily*, Dec. 2, 1983, Page 6). The news articles above conveyed that the governments and people of the China and Japan look forward to the friendship between the two sides and the strengthening of cooperation in the modernization of China.

Secondly, the “motherland consciousness” means that the Chinese correspondents in Japan had to collect information for internal reference. For example, Wu stated that the Chinese correspondents actively reported on the views of the Tanaka former Cabinet of Japan on Sino-Japanese relations and the Taiwan issue, and sent the information back in time for the Chinese central government’s reference which was playing the role of mouthpiece when diplomatic relations between China and Japan had not yet been restored. Meanwhile, the Chinese side’s opinions on the important issue were reported and published by the Chinese newspaper, and thus relayed to the Japanese side which was playing the role of eyes and ears. For example, the news article titled “Premier Zhou Enlai’s Speech at the Banquet to Welcome the Delegation of the Government of the Democratic People’s Republic of Yemen” published in the *People’s Daily* on July 10, 1972, Page 2, noted that former Premier Zhou Enlai’s statement on the Tanaka Cabinet’s views on Sino-Japanese relations. Therefore, it can be inferred that the two sides have exchanged views on important issues of bilateral relations through news media before the formal negotiations on the normalization of diplomatic relations between China and Japan.

Thirdly, the “motherland consciousness” can be confirmed from that the Chinese correspondents actively collect and report on the experience of Japan’s economic development to respond to the Chinese government’s need. Wu Xuewen recalled that “In order to serve the needs of China’s reform and opening up, I conducted a lot of interviews and reports on how Japan uses scientific achievements to accelerate economic development, as well as the experience and lessons in personnel training and financial management [26]”. For example, a newsletter entitled “Modern Literature Museum in Japan (《日本近代文学馆》)” published by Wu Xuewen on *People’s Daily* on August 1979 introduced information on the work, collection, and management methods of the Modern Literature Museum in Japan. This report drew the attention of Bakhtin, the literary titan of China. The *People’s Daily*, on page 8, March 12, 1981, published Bakhtin’s text calling for the establishment of a modern

Chinese literature museum in his *Memoirs of Creation*, which then triggered strong social reactions in China. Besides, the *People’s Daily* published a report entitled “The Company of Minds (《头脑公司》)” on page 7 of December 4, 1980. Through the interview, Wu Xuewen introduced the experience of starting and operating a micro system technology company in Japan in detail. A report entitled “From the Current Economic Situation in Japan” on page 7 of *People’s Daily* on March 27, 1982 introduced the development of the Japanese economy at that time. All these reports were drawing attention in Chinese society and were referred to different industries and business in China.

## 5. Conclusion

Focusing on the former correspondents stationed in Japan of Xinhua News Agency, Wu Xuewen’s reporting practices, this study sheds light on the role of Chinese correspondents in the East Asian Cold War era. It summarizes that Wu perceived his roles as a mixture of roles. Specifically, as a reporter who observe and gather information, a political agent of Chinese government who accurate information purposefully and convey point views, a China’s modernizers who introduce advanced experience in science and technology.

Tokyo bureau of Xinhua News agency was established in the context of Chinese international relations and the foreign policy towards Japan during the Cold War. The Chairman Mao’s instruction of “rule the earth” led directly to the establishment of the bureau. In addition, the exchange of Chinese and Japanese correspondents in 1964 was treated as a response to the basic policy of China-Japan Civil Diplomacy, “Civil leading the way and encouraging officials” raised by the former Premier of China, Zhou Enlai. Through exchanging correspondents with Japan, Chinese government was eager to acquire Japan’s political trends and economic developments’ experience [8]. Moreover, the Chinese leaderships indicated the specific interview subjects and reporting contents to the Chinese correspondents. Otherwise, based on the instructions of the leaders of central authority, Xinhua News agency set a more specific guidelines for the Chinese correspondents to promote Sino-Japanese relations and China’s modernization drive.

Following the lives and work of Wu Xuewen who served as a correspondents covering Sino-Japanese relations for Tokyo bureau of Xinhua News agency, this study finds the “motherland consciousness” was the most significant point in role recognition of Chinese correspondents. The “motherland consciousness” means defending national interests from different perspectives. It includes the identity of safeguarding the territorial integrity of the motherland and national pride. The identity of promoting the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations termed as vital component of foreign policy in Cold War era. The identity of improving China’s economy and national construction by accumulating experience and support.

The positioning of the role of Chinese correspondent was shaped by the combined influence of the factors externally and personally. First, China’s institutional

situation stipulated that reporting activities in Japan should promote the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations and meet the needs of China's modernization from the 1950s to the 1980s. This was followed by the response of Chinese media organizations and ultimately conducted by individual Chinese correspondents. In order to promote the normalization of Sino-Japanese relations and meet the needs of China's modernization construction, Chinese correspondents deeply engraved with the brand of the times.

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