

Softcover: Hong Kong

China's journalists find chinks in the state's armor

Watchdog journalism has flourished in China over the past decade as reporters and editors risk their careers and sometimes their lives to expose official corruption and government malfeasance

BY J. MICHAEL COLE
STAFF REPORTER

Despite strong control of information by the state, the characterization of Chinese journalism as invariably propagandistic and uncritical of the authorities is an unfair one. For a minority of reporters, watchdog journalism is their raison d'être, a calling that forces them to play a constantly shifting game of cat-and-mouse with the state apparatus and corrupt local politicians who, more often than not, are the object of their reportage.

This noble tradition finds its roots in *baogao wenxue* (報告文學), or reportage literature, which artfully blends fact and fiction to expose actual events. One of the pioneers of the genre was the *China Youth Daily's* Liu Binyan (劉賓雁), whose stories exposing injustice in the 1950s earned him the designation of "rightist" and landed him in a re-education camp until the late 1970s. Only during the period of soft liberalization in the 1980s, however, did investigative journalism in a form recognizable to Western news consumers emerge in China, especially after then-premier Zhao Ziyang (趙紫陽) in 1987 incorporated the term *yulan jiandu* (輿論監督), which literally means "supervision by public opinion," into his annual report to party leaders.

This form of journalism is the subject of *Investigative Journalism in China*, which explores eight cases of watchdog journalism as told from the perspective of the prominent reporters themselves, who were invited to the Journalism and Media Studies Center at the University of Hong Kong to share their experiences. We follow reporters who throw caution to the wind as they follow their lead, reporting on such well-known cases as the saga of Wu Fang, a woman who was disfigured and abused by powerful local officials, the Henan AIDS epidemic, the China Youth Development Foundation school charity scandal, a drug rehab center in Guangzhou where women were forced into prostitution, the widespread exploitation of taxi drivers in Beijing, a cover-up of a deadly mine explosion in Shanxi Province, the rise and fall of Li Zhen (李真), a Hebei Province official who became drunk with power, and the SARS epidemic. The only important subject not covered in the book (and one wishes it had been) is reporting on ethnic tensions, such as in Xinjiang or Tibet.

REPERCUSSIONS

Every chapter is fascinating reading that not only provides an insider's account of the events themselves, but more fundamentally, exposes the story behind the story and highlights the professional — and sometimes personal — risks taken by the reporters and the news organizations that employ them. A postscript accompanies each chapter, in which the authors discuss the significance of their case for journalism in China as well as the lessons learned.

The system in China, in which media organizations pay reporters a piece rate according to the number of words published, discourages risk-taking, as journalists can ill afford to see their stories censored, and therefore unpublished. "Safe," uncontroversial stories, therefore, are the preferred option, not only by journalists, but news organizations as well.

Looming above this "self-discipline" is a mechanism that defends the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) through a web of laws and regulations, the frequent closure of news outlets, lawsuits, transfers, threats, intimidation, physical violence and the revocation of credentials. The repercussions are especially harsh if a news report is seen to be linked to "social unrest." As the CCP announced in late 2001, "the news media... must always follow the leadership of the party." Since then, stricter regulations have been implemented, most of them under President Hu Jintao (胡錦濤).

At all times, the interests of the party override the truth and define the media's role in society. Stories that are deemed too sensitive, or

PUBLICATION NOTES



INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM
IN CHINA: EIGHT CASES
IN CHINESE WATCHDOG JOURNALISM
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which could damage the reputation of the party, are often dropped by news organizations or used as *neibu cankao* (內部參考), or "internal references" — classified documents meant for limited circulation among party officials (reporters sometimes quote from a *neican*, but do so at great personal risk). This practice, added to journalists' close cooperation with police, is one of the reasons why some journalists have been accused of working as spies for the state. In other instances, a major news organization like Xinhua will attempt to "beat" smaller or commercial-oriented publications to a story to pre-empt further reporting and sanitize it before it can cause damage to the party's image.

Under this system, watchdog journalism becomes more an act of civil disobedience, the consequences of which are often negative for both the reporters and their employer. Even news outlets that seem to "get away" with an investigative story are eventually haunted by their actions, as happened to the *China Economic Times* after it reported on the taxi scandal in Beijing. Later that year, its request to propaganda officials to increase its publication frequency was turned down.

All the authors agree that *yidi jiandu* (輿地監督), or cross-regional reporting — media in one particular province reporting on sensitive events in another province — is a powerful instrument for reporters. "By taking advantage of political decentralization," one writes, "the media can minimize the risk of disciplinary action when dealing with sensitive stories." Many of the cases presented in *Investigative Journalism in China* were the result of this chink in the Chinese system's armor.

That opening, however, appeared to have closed in 2005 after *Beijing News* broke a story about violent clashes over land requisition in Hebei Province, prompting local party leaders to request the Central Propaganda Department to impose restrictions on cross-regional reporting and "dangerous meddlers." A full ban on exchanges of newspaper articles between provinces was fully implemented in July 1 this year.

The prospects of investigative journalism in China are not bright, but hope stays alive thanks to a small army of Chinese Don Quixotes who have taken on the windmills. *Investigative Journalism in China* does those truth-seekers justice by telling their stories and showing that Chinese media, though severely curtailed, is nevertheless no monolith. Practitioners of true reportage are "shouldering the door," and if enough people apply limited force to the door, the cost to each person will be minimized. Armed with the lessons derived from this book, and with the addition of Netizens and citizen reporters — who receive little treatment here — Chinese reporters could win the next round in the information war. But the game is far from over.

It's hard to tell whether Mando-pop superstar Wang Lee-hom's new film *Love in Disguise* (戀愛通告) is the cinematic accompaniment to his new album, or if Wang's new album *The 18 Martial Arts* (十八般武藝) is the sound track to his directorial debut, since the two projects are so tightly knitted together.

Mostly a formulaic vehicle that breaks little new ground, Wang builds on his self-coined "chinked-out" sound on *The 18 Martial Arts*, his 15th studio album, and further promotes his own signature sound in contrast to the output of Mando-pop's two other heavenly kings (the R 'n' B of David Tao (陶喆) and the "Chinese flavor" (中國風) of Jay Chou (周杰倫)).

The album's "chinked out" sound is mainly established by a few tracks that merge hip-hop defiance with the serenity of traditional Chinese music. The opening track *Dragon Dance* features snippets of drumming from Chinese dragon dances in a titillating declaration of cultural pride. *Last Verse of Boya* (伯牙絕弦) is the result of yet another sparkling collaboration between Wang and Mayday's (五月天) front man A-hsin (阿信), who previously elevated Wang's hip-hop driven *Along the Plum Blossoms* (在梅邊) with classical Chinese literary prose.

Wang's fusion music reaches new heights on the album, with traditional music elements performed by the China Broadcasting Chinese Orchestra (中央廣播民族樂團).

On the single *Match, Rice, Oil, Salt, Soy, Vinegar, Tea* (柴米油鹽醬醋茶), Wang extols the virtues of life's ordinary pleasures. The lyrics, written by songstress Vivian Hsu (徐若瑄), detail the bliss of everyday happiness in an unexpectedly poetic way.

Hard-earned hip-hop credibility aside, Wang's forte continues to be his soaring R 'n' B ballads rendered in his unique ABT accent in the vein of *You're Not Here* (你不在) and *The Only One* (唯一). The two theme songs from *Love in Disguise*, *Things You Didn't Know* (你不知道的事) and *Until the End of the World* (天涯海角), are the latest entries in Wang's romantic pop canon.

Though lacking innovation, *The 18 Martial Arts* does boast Wang's polished musicianship and his newfound confidence in staking out his own signature style.

— ANDREW C.C. HUANG

Three indie bands worth a listen released new EPs this summer, and all three offer a current glimpse of a maturing scene feeling its way through Western rock influences.

Orange Doll (橘娃娃), a four-piece group from Kaohsiung, which put out its first recording in 2003, has the standard sound that appeals to Taiwanese youth outside the mainstream.

The three-track *A-Ming's Songs* (阿明之歌) is full of showering distortion from electric guitars, metronome-like post-punk rhythms and spacey interludes.

But Orange Doll's post-rock noise is balanced by breezy chord progressions and dreamy melodies carried by the airy voice of female vocalist and guitarist Wama Chen (陳力寶).

She sings in accented English, unapologetically, on the chorus to *I Don't Mind If You Forget Me*. Her choppy phrasing works because it sounds honest and personal. The song has a melancholic undertone, but the mood is liberating: Chen sings with abandon, as if she has discovered solace in the song's rousing cadence and retro-pop jangle.

Orange Doll's music speaks to a youthful innocence, but it hints at more than just mere escapism. One of the EP's more memorable tracks, *Little Donkey* (小毛驢), deals sensitively with the topic of suicide through a child's imagination.

The Tic Tac's sound displays an equal amount of polish, but with less noise. The four-piece Taipei band plays indie-pop full of lush orchestration, melodrama and big rock 'n' roll drums.

Pianos, synthesizers and violins adorn this four-song release, *U Have to Go*. On the title track, the band's male lead singer and guitarist, who goes by the name Xiao Cha (小茶), croons with bittersweet urgency, and the song's deceptively catchy chorus will stick in your head.

‘You can’t think of these people as people’

This is the best book by far about the Iraq war — a rare combination of cold truth and warm compassion, writes Vietnam veteran and novelist Edward Wilson

BY EDWARD WILSON
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

This isn't a book for armchair war junkies. It's about what Wilfred Owen called "the pity of war." The center and the pity of Jim Frederick's account is the murder of the Janabis, an Iraqi family, and the rape of their 14-year-old daughter by four US soldiers. The most chilling aspect of the crime was the casual manner in which it was carried out. It was almost a joke — something to break the boredom of endless hours at a checkpoint. The soldiers did it because they had the power to do it; they didn't need a reason why — almost the invasion of Iraq in microcosm.

The rapists were from an infantry platoon in the US army's most elite division, the 101st Airborne, which provided "the Band of Brothers." It was the division sent by Eisenhower to enforce civil rights legislation and ensure that nine black children

could attend Little Rock Central High School. It is associated with honor, not atrocity. It was only natural that it would be tasked with the most dangerous area of operations in the Iraq of 2005 to 2006: the "Triangle of Death."

There are three basic things to avoid in war: getting killed, being convicted of war crimes and having a commanding officer who thinks you are useless. B Company's ill-fated 1st Platoon avoided none of these. By the end of their deployment, 11 of 1st Platoon's 33 members were dead or in jail for murder. Why? According to their commander, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Kunk, it was all their fault: "You 1st Platoon are fucked up. Fucked up! Every single one of you!" Colonel Kunk was straight out of *Catch-22*. His officers referred to his control-freak outbursts as "getting Kunked" or being under the "Kunk gun." He seemed to have had every tact and empathy instinct removed: 1st Platoon's seven killed in action "were dead because of their failings," and the survivors were "quitters, crybabies and complainers." Such leadership is not unknown in the US military. Sometimes it works, but when it doesn't, the results can be bloody.

Everything that could go wrong did go wrong. The platoon's best leaders were killed early on, and the remaining soldiers were a mixture of seething resentment, indiscipline and combat exhaustion. Young soldiers

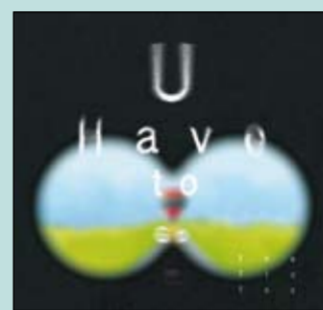
BY DAVID CHEN AND ANDREW C.C. HUANG
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The 18 Martial Arts (十八般武藝)
Wang Lee-hom (王力宏)
Sony Records



A-Ming's Songs (阿明之歌)
Orange Doll (橘娃娃)
Himalaya Records



U Have to go
The Tic Tac
Self-released



Sleeping Bag
Green!Eyes
Self-released



A Beautiful World (美麗境界)
Chyi Chin (齊秦)
Forward Music

CD Reviews: Taiwan

With its busy drumming and some impressive classic rock-style wailing from Xiao Cha, *On the Road* (在路上) goes deep into prog-rock territory. Though the band borrows from Radiohead's heart-tugging, world-weary attitude a little too much on *Tranquil Universe* (寧靜的宇宙), right down to the quiet interlude with just acoustic guitar and vocals, the song is well executed thanks to its arrangement and the band's judicious use of distortion and sampling.

The Tic Tac sounds surprisingly cohesive and tight for only having started in 2008. One of the best tracks on the EP, though, shows the band at its loosest and most jubilant. *Noah's Ark* (諾亞方舟), a piano-driven rock number, proves that Taiwanese indie rock can be quirky and make you feel good.

Green!Eyes calls *Sleeping Bag* a single, but the CD also comes with two additional tracks, which provides a fuller picture of this trio's brand of modern rock.

The brainchild of singer and guitarist Yuchain Wang (王昱辰), *Green!Eyes* also includes two seasoned musicians from the indie scene. Bassist Levon Hsu (許哲毓) is a member of the beloved group Tizzy Bac, and drummer Luo Tsun-lung (羅尊龍), who goes by the name Johnlien, plays with Boyz & Girl and Sunset Rollercoaster (落日飛車).

Wang, who writes and sings in English, is a talented young musician with a keen ear for atmosphere. He surrounded his whispery quiet, ethereal vocals on *Sleeping Bag* with warm, glassy tones from the Mellotron (a vintage synthesizer) and layers of acoustic and electric guitars. The song has a dreamy quality, and it probably helped that Wang had the EP mastered at Abbey Road Studios in London.

Old Time Lovers and *Pirate Song*, which were recorded live, offer a more realistic picture of the band. Wang's vocal timbre brings to mind David Byrne for Cutie's Ben Gibbard, while the drawn-out, noisy guitar jams nod to Wilco. Johnlien's funky, syncopated drumming and Hsu's solid bass lines provide the right space for Wang's admirable guitar skills and lyrics, which come across as intensely personal and sometimes cryptic.

— DAVID CHEN

After an eight-year hiatus, Mando-pop veteran rocker Chyi Chin (齊秦) returns to the music scene with *A Beautiful World* (美麗境界), an aptly titled opus that flaunts his polished vocals and new state of mind.

Formerly known as a singer-songwriter with a penchant for rock anthems and infectious ballads, Chyi this time returns as an interpretive singer.

With nine covers and only two new tracks, Chi makes each of *A Beautiful World's* songs his own with his subliminally emotive voice.

The opening track *Happystance* (偶然), a movie theme song from 1976, features Chyi's spine-tingling vocals with background vocals by Chen Chou-hsia (陳秋霞), who first sang the number.

The Song of Zhangsan (張三的歌), originally sung by folk icon Li Shou-chuan (李壽全) in 1987, is an inspirational anthem that has been transformed by Chyi's lovelorn vocals into an ode to romance.

The inclusion of overly familiar pop tunes such as *Leave Me* (離開我) (originally by Momoko Tao (陶晶瑩)) and *How I Envy You* (我多麼羨慕你) (originally by Maggie Chiang (江美琪)) come across as a bid to up the album's salability. However, even when tackling Faye Wong's (王菲) *Chess Piece* (棋子), Chyi proves that he is capable of putting his personal stamp on other people's work.

What Chyi displays on this album is his astonishing knack for taking previously esoteric folk or rock tunes and rendering them elegantly accessible to fans of pop.

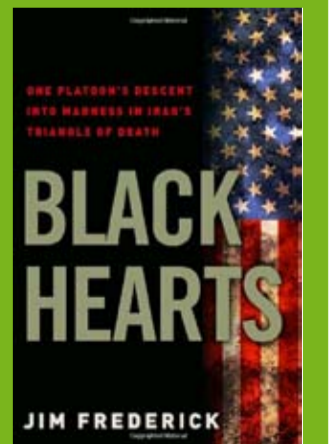
The two new tracks, *Like Madness* (像瘋了一樣) and *Long in Hatred and Short in Time* (長恨苦短), are well chosen gems.

The album features work by the string section of Beijing's China Philharmonic Orchestra (中國愛樂), which is balanced well with pop melodies.

— ANDREW C.C. HUANG

Hardcover: US

PUBLICATION NOTES



BLACK HEARTS:
ONE PLATOON'S DESCENT INTO MADNESS
IN IRAQ'S TRIANGLE OF DEATH
BY JIM FREDERICK
500 PAGES
MACMILLAN

youngster whom the army couldn't redeem. There was something that went beyond drug offences, ADHD diagnosis and his mother kicking him out of the house at 14. Before dropping out of high school, Green entertained classmates at lunchtimes by smashing drinks cans on his forehead. After the murder-rape it was reported that: "Green was jumping up and down on a cot and they all agreed that that was awesome, that was cool."

Frederick acknowledges the adrenaline buzz of battle but does not attempt to gloss over war's inherently brutal and dehumanizing nature. He is also a master at describing the psychological effects. The most feared weapon of today's wars is the ubiquitous IED (improvised explosive device). "There is nothing you can do... no release for the anger and adrenaline." The IED saps morale and spawns hate for the population: "How could you not want to kill them, too, for protecting the person who just tried to kill you?"

Inevitably, there are echoes of Vietnam, the most chilling of which comes from a 1st Platoon soldier: "You can't think of these people as people." The same dehumanization that led to My Lai led to the murder of the Janabis. And in both wars, the soldiers who refused to tolerate dehumanization were the real heroes. To his credit, Colonel Kunk acted quickly and decisively. He may not have handled the matter tactfully — he

immediately revealed the names of the whistleblowers, Justin Watt and John Diem, who risked retribution and scorn by reporting the murders — but he did the right thing.

Black Hearts is the best book by far about the Iraq war — a rare combination of cold truth and warm compassion.

Edward Wilson's latest novel, *The Darkling Spy*, is published by Arcadia