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**Morphology and typology of China correspondents:
a habitus-based approach**

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Abstract

Drawing on Bourdieu's field theory and his key construct of habitus, this study examines the "Chinese habitus" and "journalistic habitus" of China correspondents, and proposes a habitus-based typology. Theoretically, this paper attempts to advance the construct of habitus as a conceptual framework for journalism and media studies. Empirically, based on a survey analysis of 101 journalists and in-depth interviews with 20 journalists, this paper maps out the primary and secondary *habitus* of China correspondents, and further analyzes how different Chinese *habitus* and journalistic *habitus* land China correspondents into a typology of four: Spiralists, Sporadics, Sinojournos, and Sinophiles. These different positions, as the paper argues, result in different practice of China correspondents—either to maintain or to challenge the existing power structure in the field of China correspondence. The implications of these results are discussed.

Keywords: foreign correspondents; China; journalistic field; Bourdieu; habitus

Morphology and Typology of China Correspondents: A Habitus-Based Approach

Foreign correspondents as the pivotal sense makers of the distant “others”, through a process of “selective articulation” (van Ginneken, 1998), not only provide world citizens with understanding of a mediated reality “foreign” to them, but also affect foreign policy, international relations and global power wrestle. As Ebo (1997) notes, “the international image of a nation as articulated in the international media is an important assessment of the acceptance or impact of a nation’s foreign policy in the global arena” (p. 47). A conduit for influence from policy maker, both domestic and foreign, it is also a counterforce to influence back on policy making.

Whilst this “mediated reality” is a structural construction, a collective enterprise that is reached through a consensus of intersubjectivities by different agents and power relations, which are shaped socio-historically (Benson, 2005; Bourdieu, 1998, 2005; van Ginneken, 1998), how journalists as the main agents in the field achieve their current positions thus act correspondingly becomes a topic of both theoretical and empirical relevance.

Journalists’ individual background characteristics have an impact on news production. Starck and Villanueva (1992) point out that foreign correspondents’ education, professional experience, language ability, and familiarity with the history of the host country and its people all contribute to the framing of the foreign reality to home audience. Hannerz (2004) also notes, foreign correspondents tend to carry baggage from home to their overseas posting, and the baggage shapes how they view and construct concurrences into foreign news.

These qualities can and should be viewed in the frame of *habitus*, a key construct developed by Bourdieu as his solution to the structure-agency dichotomy, which he disregards as “false dilemma” (Bourdieu, 1977; Dickinson, 2008). Journalists’ *habitus*, or systems of dispositions, are exemplified by traits and thoughts such as their demographic

characteristics, educational background, professional background and experience, personal and professional values and beliefs. These dispositions “organize practices and the perception of practices” (Bourdieu, 1984), thus are the starting points for understanding foreign correspondents’ positions and practice in the field, as their position affects the degree to which it is in their interest to support or subvert the current structure of the field (Bourdieu, 1986; Handley & Rutigliano, 2012).

Existing literature on foreign correspondents has yet to explore the Bourdieuan dispositional theory of practice, which has been actively debated and advanced by scholars in ethnography (see, e.g. Wacquant, 2004), educational research (see, e.g. Lingard, Sellar, & Baroutsis, 2015), policy research (see, e.g. Greener, 2002), and music and arts studies (see, e.g. Rimmer, 2012). In journalism studies, many, especially earlier scholarships, mainly tap on foreign correspondents’ demographic profile and other characteristics in a static fashion (Hess, 1996, 2005; Lambert, 1956; Mowlana, 1975; Nair, 1991; Terzis, 2008; Willnat & Weaver, 2003); some offered valuable perspectives in identifying the evolved different overseas assignment modes (Erickson & Hamilton, 2006; Hamilton & Jenner, 2004). These classic studies have a clear focus on individual agents and their morphologies in the field, but did not link the individual dispositions with overseas modes, thus regrettably ignoring a dynamic and relational agent-structure relationship. Others such as the ethnographic study by Pedelty (1995) on US war correspondents in El Salvador brilliantly locate agents in the structures to examine the dynamics of foreign news reporting, but missing a general picture of the morphology of the foreign press corps, which is the source to explain the varying practice of correspondents.

In recent decade, media scholars are beginning to examine journalists and their practice of news production in the frame of field and *habitus*. Hovden (2008) studied the Norwegian journalistic field and journalistic habitus as his doctoral thesis, where he notes the

homologies and durability of Norwegian journalists' *habitus*, which “not only contribute to much of the logic of the journalistic field, but also contribute to making journalism a strong doxic force in society” (p. 17). Other scholars focused less on *habitus*. Schultz (2007) looked at the “doxa” news values as “constructed by reading the positions in the field” in Swedish TV newsroom; Krause (2011) examined the shifting autonomy of journalistic field in the United States.

With all the merits of theoretical exploration and empirical implications, such studies are scarce, and largely shunned away from constructing and operationalizing *habitus* as both conceptual and methodological tool. Meanwhile, there is a strikingly acute lack of scholarly attention on foreign news production in non-Western contexts such as China, whose global media presence and geopolitical significance are too strong to ignore.

China's rapid economic development outshining any major nation and growing assertive diplomatic stance brought it as the emerging new power, or even the new world order leader, to extensive global media attention. The wide variety of foreign media operating in China, the country's strong tradition of party-media system in which media are held to be “mouthpiece of the party” and highly restrictive media controls (Shirk, 2011)¹, as well as the long standing antagonism between China and foreign especially Western press corps, make the field of China correspondence an interesting case to unpack. Yet, of the increasingly proliferating studies on China and international journalism, few focused their academic query on the news makers behind the mediated image of a rising China in recent decades.

In an exploratory effort to fill the said gaps, this study employs the Bourdieuan construct of *habitus* as both conceptual and methodological tool to map the morphology of the field of China correspondence in the most recent decade of China's rise.

¹ Press freedom in China is rated as “not free” by Freedom House and ranks 176 out of 180 countries in RSF's 2016 World Press Freedom Index: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/china>

Habitus and the Field of Foreign Correspondence

Bourdieu (1986, 1994) famously uses the concept of “*field*” to refer to the social space in which *agents*, whose *positions* in the field are defined by their *habitus* and the *capitals* they possess, compete or struggle with each other for political, economic and cultural capitals. In his late academic life, Bourdieu (1998, 2005) further proposes the notion of “journalistic field”, seeing news production as a “microcosm with its own laws” (1998, p. 39). Following this vein, foreign correspondents can be considered as agents with certain *habitus* structured during their previous socialization, competing for all forms of capitals in the field.

The *habitus*, “an organizing principle of practices” (Neuve, 2007), shapes journalists’ different positions, which legitimize their power and capitals in the field. Meanwhile, learned through socializations, *habitus* has its own socio-historical trajectory. Bourdieu (1989) defines *habitus* as “a system of schemes of perception and appreciation of practices, cognitive and evaluative structures which are acquired through the lasting experience of a social position” (p. 19). Bennett (1990) for example, in reflecting on American journalists’ mistakenly over-optimistic coverage on China’s pro-democracy demonstration in 1989, notes that the “very powerful, sometimes unarticulated feelings about some very basic American values”, or “myths”, are the major reasons that contributed to the distortion.

Habitus as a socially embodied system of individual and collective dispositions is both natural and nurtured, thus can be distinguished into *primary habitus* which is generic and *secondary habitus*, which is acquired through socialization in school or the workplace. Wacquant (2014) details out three dimensions of *habitus*: cognitive (perception), conative (skills), and affective (desire, or the “lustful dimension of *habitus* formation”). Following the three dimensions to deconstruct *habitus*, one can operationalize the construct into

components including the demographic characteristics, educational background, prior life and career experience, values and interests in the profession and in general.

But *habitus* is not static. It is fluid, constantly structured by the structure. China correspondents are evolving, with their *habitus* different from previous generation, transforming or maintaining the power structures in the field. For example, Song and Lee (2014, 2016)'s studies on US journalists covering China in the 1970s and 1980s identified the changing authority structure and "enduring values" behind US correspondents' "journalistic paradigm shifts".

This study, acknowledging the fluidity of *habitus*, tries to unpack that of the current generation of China correspondents, or the individual agents in the field of China correspondence, and proposes an operationalization of *habitus* in an explorative attempt, so to offer a *habitus*-based typology of China correspondents. It is expected that this largely heuristic attempt could shed lights on understanding the dynamics of China reporting in the new global order, and, more importantly, to contribute to the promising new paradigm of field theory and using *habitus* as both methodological tool and concept in future journalism studies.

Research Methods

The difficulty to empirically operationalize the concept of *habitus* has been acknowledged (see, e.g. Swartz, 1997). In the very limited scholarly endeavour to measure *habitus*, the majority employed qualitative ethnography (an example would be the work of Wacquant, on boxers) or interviews; some scholars also tried quantitative survey data in an explorative way to disclose conceptions of *habitus* (see, e.g. Bodovski, 2015).

Acknowledging the merits and limits of either method, this study employed a concurrent triangulation design, collecting data from both survey and semi-structured in-depth interview, complemented with literature of China correspondents' reporting notes, interviews, which are

all available on internet. The combined research design is intended to understand China correspondents' *primary habitus* including their basic demographics (age, gender, and education level), and *secondary habitus* including their perception, past experience related to China, and journalistic skills. The measurement of *habitus* is further used to categorize China correspondents, proposing a *habitus*-based typology.

The survey was implemented from October 2015 to February 2016. The whole population of foreign correspondents effectively registered in mainland China at the time of the study (May 2015 to April 2016) with a valid email address provided by the "Foreign Press Directory" issued by China's Foreign Ministry is selected for the survey (N=604). The questionnaire was designed in both English and Chinese, to maximize the response rate, and was pre-tested with former foreign correspondents in China.

By the end of 2016, altogether 101 valid responses were collected. Of them, 95 were collected via English language questionnaire, and 6 were from Chinese language version. Response rate is 16.7%. The respondents are from news outlets of 25 countries.

From November 2015 to February 2016 in Beijing, and April 2016 in Shanghai, I conducted 20 in-depth interviews with former and current China correspondents. These interviews ran from 50 minutes to 120 minutes, averaging just over one hour. Permission to audio-record the interview was granted in all cases, but the identities of some interviewees are withheld, upon their request.

As the sample may not meet the stringent statistical requirement of randomness, it should be noted that significance tests to be performed in what follows are intended primarily for heuristic purposes. They may, however, become rather revealing if the results of such tests are consistent in terms of direction and pattern.

Primary Habitus: Demographics

Demographics of a group connote the picture of age, nationality, gender, and education, revealing much about the *primary habitus* of the individual agents entering the field. The survey data provide the opportunity to picture the basic demographic dispositions of China correspondents, who are generally well-educated (97% of the respondents hold a college degree or above) and experienced (with an average of 15.8 years working experience as a professional journalist), but heavily male-dominated (only 23.2% of the respondents are women). They are mostly middle-aged in their 30s or 40s. Only two respondents are as young as in their early 20s, fresh college graduates.

[Table 1 here]

The collective *primary habitus* of high education level figures in prominence. Only three of the respondents have not attended formal college education. 45.5% of the respondents have a master's degree, and seven out of the 101 respondents hold a doctoral degree.

[Table 2 here]

China prohibits its nationals from working as journalists for foreign news organizations operating in China. Therefore, all officially-accredited China correspondents are foreign nationals. Almost two thirds of them do not have any connections to or living experience in China prior to their China postings. Yet resourceful Anglo-American media outlets always manage to keep several ethnic Chinese. Around 15% of the respondents were born Chinese, or with Chinese origin. Chinese-majority city-state Singapore is another major source of such talents for China correspondents². The increasingly prominent backflow of migrated ethnic Chinese, born in China but educated in the West, are figuring their ever-growing importance in the foreign press corps in China³. Most of them speak native Chinese,

² The *New York Times*' Beijing correspondent Sui-lee Wee, Associate Press's Gillian Wong, and *Wall Street Journal*'s Beijing correspondent Chun Han Wong are all Singaporean Chinese.

³ Examples are: US national Gerry Shih of Associate Press, US national Didi Tang of *Times*, British national Yuan Yang of *Financial Times*, US national Keith Zhai of Bloomberg.

which is an asset for entering the field and, in most cases, for consolidating their positions as well.

In the restrictive journalistic environment of China, being ethnic Chinese also helps to evade unwanted attention and ensuing obstruction, thus lessening the tension between journalists and local coercive apparatuses. AFP's Beijing correspondent Joanna Chiu, a Canadian born in Hong Kong, notes the convenience of being an ethnic Chinese: "Most of the time I'm not being noticed, which is a big advantage."

[Table 3 here]

Overall, the data on journalists' *primary habitus* suggest some collective dispositions including heavy male dominance and high education level. The next section tries to unpack their *secondary habitus*, which is nurtured, rather than by nature. As for China correspondents, both *Chinese habitus* and *journalistic habitus* are key tools for the entry and augmentation in the field of China correspondence. Therefore, I will discuss these two sets of *habitus* separately, before detailing the *habitus*-based typology of China correspondents.

Chinese Mind, Chinese *Habitus*

One needs a "Chinese mind" to do fair reporting and understanding of China (Fu, 2000). But this "Chinese mind" is not "ascribed", rather, it should be an "achieved" status (Lee, 1990). Correspondents' previous life experience connected to China, like education background in China (learning Chinese or China studies) and personal connections with China (born Chinese; having family in China, etc.), breed such Chinese mind, or *Chinese habitus*. Chinese language proficiency and how long a correspondent has stayed on his/her China posting are also important indicators for such Chinese *habitus*. Following the aforementioned Wacquant (2014)'s three dimensions of *habitus*, I computed a new composite variable "*Chinese habitus*" covering Chinese language proficiency, Chinese education,

personal connections with China⁴, and years of working experience in China, largely encompassing the three dimensions of cognitive, conative, and affective. The four variables are converted to their z-score respectively and added up to compose the new variable *Chinese habitus*⁵.

Generation Gap?

A multi-factor ANOVA test shows age is a significant predictor of correspondents' *Chinese habitus*, $F(7,63) = 3.59$, $p = .003$. Yet it is not a linear correlation between *Chinese habitus* and age. Those aged between 46 and 50 on average score the highest in *Chinese habitus* ($M = 1.88$, $SD = .68$), while younger correspondents below 30 and those between 41 and 45 score the lowest.

[Figure 1 here]

Take US journalists as an example. Bennett (1990) categorizes American correspondents to China into three waves: the first wave studied China afar in the 1960s and 1970s; the second wave are professional journalists assigned to China in the 1980s but knew very little on China; the third wave are educated after China's opening-up in the 1970s, elite and liberal, with more realistic experience and in-depth understanding about China, as they have easier and more diverse access to either formal or informal China education, unlike their

⁴ In the questionnaire seven scenarios were provided for respondents to choose from to indicate the closest to their personal connection with China: 1. Born a Chinese national; 2. Ethnic Chinese or with Chinese origin; 3. Married to a Chinese; 4. In a relationship with a Chinese; 5. Having lived in China before China correspondent posting; 6. Other personal connections; 7. No personal connection with China. As "born as a Chinese national" may be taken as the strongest personal Chinese connection, while others can be labeled as "weak personal Chinese connection", for calculating purpose of the composite variable "Chinese habitus", the original variable "personal Chinese connection" was then recoded to indicate various depth of personal Chinese connection: 0. No personal connection with China; 1. Weak personal connection with China; 2. Strong personal connection with China.

⁵ The internal reliability of these four variables is unsurprisingly only moderate ($\alpha = .52$), as they are not necessarily interrelated. Instead, sometimes they are complementary to each other. Personal China-related life experience can be totally different from formal education in China studies or alike, which can be acquired afar from China. For example, a journalist may know China and Chinese language quite well because of personal China-related experience, rather than formal education.

American peers doing embedded journalism in China in the 70's as described in Song and Lee (2014)'s study.

The third wave Anglo journalists, now in their 40s or early 50s, became the backbone of the foreign press corps in China. Their *Chinese habitus* excel among all age groups. An exemplar is Anthony Kuhn, NPR Beijing correspondent for four years. Born in the 1960s to the prestigious American China historian Philip Kuhn and Chinese Cheng Wu, Anthony Kuhn attended Nanjing University for graduate program in Chinese studies. His Mandarin is good enough to impress Chinese public at a state press conference⁶. Chris Buckley of *New York Times* earned his PhD in China studies in the 1990s and was working in China as a translator and teacher before becoming a journalist here; his Chinese language proficiency and understanding of the culture are hailed by his peers as a model to look up to.

In the same age group, however, correspondents from Continental European countries (especially Democratic Corporatist countries in Hallin and Mancini's classification of media systems), most on their first China stint, are much less equipped with Chinese *habitus*.

But Chinese *habitus* of younger correspondents in their early 30s or late 20s is rather homogenous across all countries. Mostly born in the 1980s or even 1990s, and educated in a new global order where China is growing to unprecedented prominence, they may well be labeled as the "fourth wave". Their encounter with China is largely facilitated by the rapid economic development of China especially in metropolis, the social networks, and a growing number of Chinese millennials who share more similarities with their Western peers compared with older generation.

Chinese Language

⁶ <http://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2017/03/18/519216823/for-years-ive-been-a-correspondent-in-china-this-month-i-became-a-viral-star>

Chinese language ability, as the conative dimension of “*Chinese habitus*”, is the most dominant disposition for individual agents to enter the field. Being able to speak local language is always much valued for foreign correspondents. Of the survey respondents, 40% speak fluent or native Chinese (8% of the surveyed correspondents are native Chinese speakers); 29% speak intermediate Chinese, while another 24% say they only speak basic Chinese. 7% of them do not speak any Chinese. Though the result only reflects self-evaluation of their language ability, the overall picture is very telling in many ways. Knowing the local language is an important component of *habitus* in fighting for an advantageous position in the field of foreign correspondence. Especially for the most resourceful Anglo-American news wires (Associate Press, Reuters, etc.), sufficient Chinese language ability is not only desired, but also required.

Peruvian journalist Isolda Morillo is one of the very few, if not the only, foreign correspondent in China who write and publish literature in Chinese. Her parents, who are both university professors, moved to China to teach literature since the 1980s. At the time, Morillo spent a few years in China. Such experiences bred, in her own words, her “strong Chinese complex”, an avid interest in China’s society and culture which shaped her thirst to learn the language. She mainly taught by herself, and entered the field of practicing journalism in China, first as a journalist for Spanish Television and then for the Associated Press.

But institutionally, for most foreign correspondents, inept Chinese skill does not harm the chance of getting the job, as it is still very challenging for smaller news organizations to recruit such talents with both language skills and journalistic literacy. Apart from the aforementioned Anglo-American news wires, most news organizations do not offer incentive nor impose any requirement for their correspondents to learn Chinese. So learning Chinese

on the job is more a self-initiated challenge, on which many China correspondents become a quitter.

Journalistic *Habitus*

Willig (2013) proposes to examine journalists' professional *habitus*, or “*journalistic habitus*”, as a mastering of a specific bodily knowledge based on practice and experience. Like other dispositions, *journalistic habitus* influences correspondents' position and practice in the field. Pedelty (1995) found among foreign correspondents in El Salvador that those “trained in fields other than journalism” tended to produce more in-depth, critical reporting. Van Ginnenken (1998) notes that “journalistic ideology” bred in professional journalism training guides journalists toward routine frames. The former *HuffPost* correspondent Matt Sheehan, who had no journalism education or training before taking up the post as China correspondent, describes *journalistic habitus* before getting to know China as a baggage: “If you arrive in China as a journalist, without really knowing the country yet, everything you see is organized in a story pattern, with a good guy and a bad guy, and certainly with a conclusion.”

Foreign correspondents traditionally are not prominently identified by formal journalism education, as previous studies note. Tunstall (1974) characterizes many British foreign correspondents as the product of Oxford or Cambridge in fields other than journalism, which did not make the curriculum of those elite institutions. Harding (1990) and Bennett (1990) recount that some of U.S.'s China correspondents who did not major in journalism or Chinese studies ranked among the most distinguished performers.

To empirically test this pattern among China correspondents, similar to *Chinese habitus*, I calculated the variables of professional education (majored in journalism or not)

and length of professional journalistic career into a new composite variable “*journalistic habitus*”.

Overall, only one thirds of the respondents have received formal journalism education in college or graduate school. The ratio is even lower for non-Western correspondents: only 25.9% (N=27) of them have had formal journalism education. They are mostly trained in other related fields of political sciences, international relations, history, economics, and China or Asian studies. The result shows formal journalism education does not seem to be a general requirement to enter the field of foreign reporting, as found elsewhere in previous studies (Willnat & Weaver, 2003; Wu & Hamilton, 2004).

Yet in America with strong journalistic professionalism, formal education in journalism does appear to be a more important quality to enter the field. Many correspondents from US news organizations hold a degree in journalism from elite universities. The former *New York Times* Beijing bureau chief Edward Wong gained his master degree in journalism from UC Berkley; Rob Schmitz, Shanghai correspondent for NPR, has a master degree in journalism from Columbia University. In contrast, the only African correspondent, Aina Julietta of Nigerian National TV, majored in French in college; Indian correspondent Ananth Krishnan of *India Today* holds a master’s degree in Indian history, and Sutirtho Patranobis, another Indian correspondent for the *Hindustan Times*, majored in English literature.

Spiralists, Sinophiles, Sinojournos, and Sporadics

As discussed earlier, the variance in foreign correspondents’ *habitus* is closely related to their positions in the field. Hannerz (2004), quoting a veteran China correspondent, categorizes China correspondents into three types: spiralists who come for a certain length of stint and leave for the next posting afterwards, Sinophiles whose priority is to live in China

rather than to “report” in China and was barely based somewhere else as a journalist, and national journalists sporadically on one overseas stint here (I call them “Sporadics”). The typology reflects how individual agents are positioned differently with different *habitus* in the field of China correspondence.

However, Hannerz’s typology does not cover all patterns for current China correspondents. Besides Sinophiles, there is another group who try to balance staying in China and doing journalism both as their priorities. They are different from Sinophiles mainly in their *affective dimension* of journalistic *habitus*, or the desire and commitment they invest into the journalistic field. Unlike Sinophiles who hold rather weak affection in journalism and practice it only as a conduit for their strong affection in other China-related fields (academia, think tanks, or public relations), this fourth category are heavily committed in both China and journalism; they stay in China for a considerably long time not for the sake of staying in China, but to specifically work as China correspondents. I name them “Sinojournos”.

Thus in the field of China correspondence, there are four types of agents: Spiralists, Sporadics, Sinophiles, and Sinojournos. The four groups, distinctively differing in their *habitus*, represent four types of positions in the field, which unavoidably result in different practice.

For a clear empirical picture of this typology, I used a two-step clustering analysis to group the survey respondents based on their *Chinese habitus*, number of previous overseas postings, and years of working as China correspondent⁷. As discussed earlier, Sinophiles and Sinojournos should score the highest in *Chinese habitus* but Sinojournos have much more experience working as a China correspondent; Spiralists are the most experienced in previous

⁷ As the *affective dimension* as subjective commitment is less direct to operationalize, I will discuss about its difference among the four types of China correspondents qualitatively.

overseas assignments, while Sporadics do not excel in either *Chinese habitus* or foreign correspondent experience.

The cluster result is satisfactory, with an average Silhouette at 0.6, and all three variables score a larger than 0.65 predictor importance.

[Table 2 here]

The majority are Sinophiles (43.6%) and Sporadics (35.6%), who do not have much foreign correspondence experience. 10.9% of the respondents are Spiralists, or professional foreign correspondents, for whom China posting is only one chapter in their excitement-ridden journey of foreign correspondence around the globe; they did not have much China-related socialization before being posted to China, scoring the lowest in *Chinese habitus*. An even smaller proportion can be categorized as the most committed Sinojournos, who score the highest in *Chinese habitus*, and have stayed in China as foreign correspondent for most, if not all, of their professional life.

A common overseas assignment for most news outlets runs between three to five years. From the statistics, both Spiralists and Sporadics stay in China for barely one term, and Sinophiles on average stay for one to two terms. Though most Sinophiles especially Sinojournos try to stay on longer after their term is done⁸, most news organizations expect their foreign correspondents to return to home desk, or switch bureaus. The rationale behind such common practice of news organizations, as explained by Morrison and Tumber (1985), is that staying on an overseas posting too long may make the correspondents “go native” (p. 461), meaning upholding too strong local *habitus*, which is widely believed to blind the fresh eye of correspondents when reporting the over-familiar host country. Similarly, familiarity

⁸ In such scenario, correspondents usually can negotiate with their news companies for another term. But if the company policy is not as flexible, the correspondent would have to quit their job in order to stay on in China. An example is Australian ABC’s Beijing correspondent Stephan McDonald. After his two terms with ABC was done, he left ABC to join BBC in order to stay on in China.

with Chinese society and the language structurally facilitates understanding cultural messages, but it also breeds inattention to occurrences. Thus most news organizations set limits on each overseas posting, to keep their foreign coverage “fresh”. As veteran China correspondent Chris Buckley notes, “without any Chinese skills correspondents can still do a very good job with their fresh eyes and different perspectives”.

However, if the correspondent is unbeatable in his or her mastery of “Chinese mind”, news organizations tend to go flexible with the contract so to minimize organizational cost to train a new replacement. This is especially common with Anglo-American news organizations who have been in effect setting the international news agenda. A senior editor at Reuters said they encourage correspondents to stay longer: “Even if you are an experienced journalist (and) you speak Chinese, coming to China it takes at least a year to figure out what’s going on.”

These four types of China correspondents show significant variance in their *journalistic habitus*, $F(3, 97) = 3.88, p = .011$. Spiralists on average score considerably higher ($M = 1.03$) than those categorized as Sinophiles ($M = -.26$) and Sporadics ($M = -.13$).

Spiralists: Globetrotting News Hotspots

Spiralists make foreign correspondence their career, but not confined to one specific posting. They cover different transitional and volatile regions in the world, moving between stints which normally range from three to five years, thus are most likely to possess the “cosmopolitan” *habitus* (Hannerz, 2004). To certain extent, they are *international correspondents* rather than *foreign correspondents*. This is especially true of those working with international media such as Reuters, AFP, and CNN. A Beijing-based Reuters correspondent objected to being labelled as a “foreign correspondent”: “We are not *foreign correspondents*. At Reuters we only have *correspondents*. No country is ‘foreign’ to us.” Yet

such “stateless” quality is only ideal. “Cosmopolitan” international correspondents still carry baggage from home, from the social system and education system they came from. Thus, as Hannerz (2004) admits, “any claim to cosmopolitanism would seem to be weakened”.

Though lacking local knowledge and connections, they are seen as contributing to the China correspondence with the strongest *journalistic habitus*, especially in the affectionate dimension, in the field. “The best job in the world”, is what I heard most from Spiralists on how they like their job as a foreign correspondent. Jane Perlez of *New York Times* in Beijing is one of such typical “globetrotting Spiralists”. She covered the Afghan war, the famine in Somalia, the civil wars in Sudan and Somalia, and gold mining in Southeast Asia, before joining the *Times* Beijing office. Bernhard Zand of *der Spiegel* has been based in Istanbul, Cairo and Dubai covering wars and conflicts before coming to China in 2012. Spanish correspondent Javier Espinosa of *El Mundo* spent 12 years reporting from conflict-stricken Middle East before trying his hand in China since 2014.

Having based in a number of other global news hotspots, they tend to believe that their professional perception and practice are well applied into different social settings they cover. Thus this group of China correspondents would transfer their practice in other journalistic fields directly into the foreign journalistic field in China, in many cases, challenging the power relations with institutional constraints. This is typically exemplarized in Bernhard Zand’s comment on comparing China assignment to his previous postings:

I interviewed, in the Middle East, heads of the states, from the king of Jordan, president of Syria, to the prince of Dubai, the president of Turkey, etc. All these people spoke relatively freely to us...But (in China) I don't know why they (Chinese leaders) are so shy to speak to western press.

Spiralists’ challenges to the status quo of the field may come with real impact. A “Sinojourno” himself, Buckley notes that such “Spiralists”, by daring to “do stories that

would offend the government, knowing that they are only staying for a short time”, create pressure on the whole foreign press corps to maintain alert and sensitive to topics which they might otherwise overlook or self censor.

Sinojournos: lifetime commitment in both China and journalism

Sinojournos tend to stay for a considerable length in China, in some cases for their entire professional life, strongly committed to China or the region of East Asia. They are committed to reporting China, as they regard China is “one of the wonderful places to be for a reporter, because it is both amazing and important”⁹.

Veteran China correspondent Jaime FlorCruz, who has spent more than 40 years living and working in China, was a student at Peking University in the 1970s before he started as a news assistant with the *Time* magazine, which led to his life-long profession as a China correspondent. Buckley started as a researcher for the *New York Times* in Beijing before becoming a professional journalist with the Reuters for seven years and then with the *New York Times* again. Both have spent their entire career life in China and are established as exemplary China correspondents, highly respected for their resourceful local connections and unbeatable knowledge of the country.

Some Sinojournos, in order to stay on as China correspondent, choose to leave their home media organization to join those of a third country. This is mostly seen among journalists from Anglo-American countries. Stephen McDonnell, an Australian correspondent working for Australian Broadcasting Corporation for nine years in Beijing, after having overstayed the company’s contract, joined BBC Beijing bureau¹⁰. When it came to a choice between his home employer and China, “China gets under your skin — it's an unstoppable

⁹ Mike Forsythe, personal communication, January 2016

¹⁰ <https://www.crikey.com.au/2015/12/11/stephen-mcdonell-on-why-beijing-will-be-the-last-bureau-standing/>

juggernaut of change, and I just wasn't ready to let it go," McDonnell writes emotionally in his farewell piece on ABC website.¹¹

But it needs to be noted that "Sinojournos" here only denotes the correspondents' commitment to China, not that to the Chinese government. They can be China-committed yet still critical of the government and elites, though some became collaborative by working for China's state media, or assisting in their work¹².

Sinophiles: Give me China. I don't care much about journalism

Sinophiles, though very much committed to Chineseness, hold very weak *affection* in the field of journalism. They do not desire to be playing the game of journalism; rather, they take the job as a means to better understand and integrate into China. Usually Sinophiles aim at a career as *China experts* or *Sinologist*, rather than *China correspondents*. They may serve a very short stint as a professional journalist in China, followed by other professions outside journalism, either in academics or business, but always focus on China.

HuffPost's Matt Sheehan, though having lived in China for five years and passionate about Sino-US relations and Chinese culture, left the job only after two years as their China correspondent. When asked why the retreat, Sheehan simply said: "Well, it's interesting, but, not a sustainable career." Now, Sheehan joined a US think tank on China policy and meanwhile runs his blog and newsletter on Sino-US relations.

In the case of aforementioned Associate Press' Isolda Morillo, having been a China correspondent for more than a decade, she recently left her job as a journalist for family reason, and says that she will not be practicing the profession in other parts of the world. "I

¹¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-12-14/china-correspondent-stephen-mcdonell-farewells-abc/7025736>

¹² e.g. Jean Conley of *Washington Post* and Stephen Tripoli of NPR were sub-editors at *China Daily* in Beijing from mid-1986 to mid-1987.

will only practice journalism in China...Practicing journalism for me is doing field research, which is the best way to understand China.” When asked how she would identify herself, Morillo used the term “empirical Sinologist”: “Between ‘China studies’ and China reporting, I chose the latter; I don’t want to be a Sinologist in the Ivory Tower. My research and studies are my field research, i.e., the stories I filed.” She is now running a publishing company, to continue her passion in Chinese literature.

Other Sinophiles are more detached from the trade of journalism. A Turkish journalist-turned-artist has been in China for more than a decade. He helped set up the China bureaus for a number of Turkish media including its national news agency and a national TV. At the time of this study he serves as the China correspondent for Turkish national newspaper *Yurt*, but is retreating from journalism. “The income is very bad (practicing journalism),” he reflected on the profession as a China correspondent, in a traditional Chinese teahouse hidden in a popular art district in Beijing. But it was a reporting trip to Japan that made him determined to divorce journalism. Sent to the neighbouring Japan to cover the devastating earthquake in 2011, he realized upon arrival that the situation was life-threatening. He asked to leave the site but his employer insisted him to fly to the epicenter and report from there. Frustrated, he chose to sneak away with a rescue team from Australia. “I can still write something about China if the Turkish embassy or whoever approach me for stories. But now I’m mainly engaged in film making”, he concludes in relief and satisfaction.

Sinophiles usually do not try to change the existing power relations in the field. Instead, they mostly follow the norms in the safest way, interact less with peer correspondents, and barely challenge authorities. To them, journalism is just a means for gaining “Chineseness” or even just for living, sometimes a transition to other more lucrative fields, namely where they can more easily gain capitals of all forms.

Sporadics: Journalism Alright; China just a Passing

Unlike Spiralists, Sporadics do not take foreign correspondent as their lifetime profession. They exhibit less *journalistic habitus*, especially in the affective dimension, in the game of journalism. Their *Chinese habitus* is also weak. They have long been journalists at home desks and are brought to China by some sporadic assignments. Most of them do not have plans to stay in China for long, and in most cases expect to return home after the China stint, ideally with a promotion. To many of them, China assignment, apart from its innate attractiveness, serves as a passing stepping-stone.

Sporadics are mostly seen among correspondents from non-Western and Continental European countries. German public radio ARD's Shanghai correspondent began his China assignment first as a summer replacement for the then Shanghai correspondent for several months, which led to a five-year stint in China. His predecessor, after five years in China, went back in Berlin where he opened a café, never in journalism again. His colleague in ARD Beijing office had just started his China posting (his first overseas assignment) when we met in early 2016, after more than 10 years' reporting in Germany. Finnish public broadcaster YLE Beijing correspondent Mika Mäkeläinen, a veteran journalist with more than 20 years' experience in his home country Finland, was serving a two-year China stint, which is a "company norm".

Sporadics, exhibiting very limited *Chinese habitus*, are more like what Hannerz (2007) distinguishes as "expatriates". They do not have strong commitment to the host country and its culture, often more affluent than local Chinese and enjoying a lifestyle close to home. A German correspondent based in Shanghai chose to bring everything from Germany to China—from olive oil to flour—and lived in a spacious apartment with historic significance in the French Concession—a life nothing but European. In contrast, a typical

Sinophile or Sinojourno is most likely to be found in a typical *hutong* (small and historical alley in old residential area of Beijing) house and indulging him/herself in street food.

This “expatriate” positioning of Sporadics colours their way of journalistic practice in the field of China correspondence as well. They tend to rely more on press review and peers, instead of investing time to develop local connections, thus effectively enforcing the existing power structures in the field. Compared with other three types of correspondents, especially Spiralists, expatriate Sporadics are also more attuned to organizational norms and control of their home countries.

Conclusion

This study is an exploratory sociological analysis of the field of China correspondence, from the theoretical and methodological focus on the *habitus* of China correspondents. Using a concurrent triangulation design with 101 online survey, 20 semi-structured in-depth interview, and online self accounts of current generation of China correspondents, the study tries to map the morphology of the field, which is composed of a largely male-dominated and well-educated mass of agents, who share some collective *primary habitus* which functions in effect as the entry limit. Foreign correspondents as agents enter the field in China with different secondary *habitus*. Their varying degree of *journalistic habitus* and *Chinese habitus* are structured in their own histories prior to their China posting, and also are structuring their positions and practice in the field.

One of the major contributions of this paper is the proposed *habitus*-based typology of journalists. China correspondent’s *habitus* distinguish them into four types. Spiralists are more committed to their profession as a “foreign correspondent” rather than “China correspondent”, demonstrating strong *journalistic habitus* but weak *Chinese habitus*. With

strong cosmopolitan professionalism, they are most likely to challenge the existing power relations in the field.

The less cosmopolitan Sporadics have little commitment to China. Assigned to a usually brief overseas posting from home desks, they are more attuned to bureaucratic and organizational norms and control, more reliant on press review and peers, thus enhancing the existing power relations of the China correspondence field.

In contrast, Sinojournos and Sinophiles have gained strong *Chinese habitus* prior to their China postings. Sinojournos tend to secure a stable position as China correspondents in a long run, with high mobility between news organizations but low mobility in location. With extensive local connections and rich knowledge about China, they often become the “reference group” among foreign press corps, for sources, story frames, etc.

The least committed group Sinophiles have strong *Chinese habitus* yet the weakest journalistic habitus. They are most likely to leave journalism for other fields; while within the field, they do not intend to change or challenge the existing power relations in the field, either do they try to consolidate or elevate their positions.

Theoretically, findings of this study are expected to shed lights on exploring the construct of *habitus* as a conceptual framework for journalism and media studies; the measurement of *habitus* hopefully inspires further debates and discussion on the operationalization of the central construct in Bourdieu’s dispositional theory of practice. Empirically, the measurement of the primary and secondary *habitus* of China correspondents, and the *habitus*-based typology advance our understanding of foreign correspondents in the new political economy of international reporting; such understanding helps predict some patterns in China reporting: more correspondents exhibiting stronger Chinese *habitus* are entering the field, bring the prospect of advancing the breath and depth of China reporting, and further complex the dynamics between journalists and state coercive apparatus; yet the

majority of China correspondents still being Sporadics or Sinophiles, rather than Sinojournos or Spiralists, contribute to maintaining the status quo of the field of China correspondence.

However, it needs to be noted that these pattern predictions are based on the thesis that *habitus* of the agents set the basis of power relations in the field of foreign correspondence. But as much as Bourdieu is not a determinist, I am by no means suggesting *habitus* have the ominous power to structure or determine if an agent is to take the position of Sinojourno, Spiralist, Sinophile or Sporadic. *Habitus*, especially journalistic and Chinese *habitus*, does play a major role in setting an agent's position and shaping his/her practice in the foreign journalistic field in China, yet as discussed earlier, *habitus* per se is always in a fluid state, shaped and accumulated during the ever-stretching personal and social trajectory. The structuring of the position and field is a dynamic process, forever developing and evolving.

Besides, *habitus* at individual level aside, other factors including newsroom norms, or routines, organizational constraints and institutional pressure, all contribute to the structure of the field of China correspondence and the position and practice of correspondents. Further studies could address the power of these factors and China correspondents' negotiation with these factors.

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Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics: Age*

Age	
25 and below	2%
26-30	15.8%
31-35	14.9%
36-40	20.8%
41-45	17.8%
46-50	11.9%
51-60	10.9%
61 and above	5.9%
Total	100%
N	101

Table 2. *Demographic Characteristics: Education*

Education	
No college	3%
College/University	44.6%
Master's Degree	45.5%
Doctoral Degree	6.9%
Total	100%
N	101

Table 3. *Demographic Characteristics: Personal Ties with China*

Personal ties with China	
Born Chinese national	3%
With Chinese origin	11.9%
Married to, or in romantic relationship with Chinese national	10.9%
Previous living experience in China	1%
Others	6.9%
No personal ties with China	66.3%
Total	100%
N	101

Table 4. *Cluster Analysis Result of China Correspondents' Positions*

types	N (%)	Chinese habitus	Number of	Years of working as
		M (SD)	previous overseas	China correspondent
			postings	M (SD)
			M (SD)	
Spiralists	11 (10.9)	-2.68 (.90)	3.00 (1.10)	3.27 (2.51)
Sporadics	36 (35.6)	-2.07 (1.01)	.42 (.50)	2.74 (1.78)
Sinophiles	44 (43.6)	1.32 (1.27)	.32 (.52)	6.65 (3.81)
Sinojournos	10 (9.9)	4.58 (1.42)	.70 (.67)	20.05 (4.86)
Total	101			

Figure 1. *Chinese Habitus Score by Age Group*