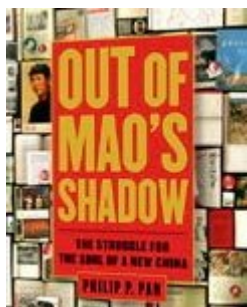


Book provides insightful history lessons about China

By Kathryn Reed

Disturbing is the word that resonated with me as I kept flipping the pages of “Out of Mao’s Shadow: The struggle for the soul of a new China.”

I have read plenty of news accounts about China and its repressive government as well as stories about it being more progressive. But the 337-page account by Philip P. Pan brought to life incidents from that huge nation that I was not familiar with.



Pan was in China from 2000-07 as a journalist for the *Washington Post*. His book was published in 2008.

As China continues to be a major player in the world – politically and economically – it is imperative we better understand this country that clearly has a seat at the world table.

I understand now China is more complex than I had realized. Saying it’s repressed is oversimplifying things. Saying it is a Communist country is true, but the political-economic structure is not purely traditional communism.

Most people know about the June 1989 massacre of democracy protesters at Tiananmen Square. And, though, that was a pivotal moment in China internally and for how the world views the country, it’s one of many significant moments.

Like all countries, the past is not a bed of rose pedals – many sharp thorns that can still cause pain are buried in what we call history. Pan does a tremendous job of exposing those thorns.

The incidents depicted in the book are disturbing in themselves. But even more so for me was the realization of how the citizenry of China seems to know so little about its past. Such are the hazards of a sprawling country where most of the residents live in rural areas without many modern conveniences.

A media without much of a voice is also part of the problem.

Although the Internet is allowing more diverse commentary to seep into society, the Chinese government sensors what is published and what residents have access to.

“Out of Mao’s Shadow” is a great trip through various segments of China’s past, though some is rather recent. It’s not a history book in the sense of being dry and boring. It is the story of people affected by the historical moment, the people making history, and the outcome of their actions and those of the government.