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China Inside Out: Bob Woodruff Reports

(News special -- ABC, Wed. Aug. 6, 10 p.m.) Produced by the Documentary Group for ABC News. Executive producer, Tom Yellin; senior producer, Kayce Freed Jennings; producer, Gabrielle Tenenbaum.

Correspondent: Bob Woodruff.

By [BRIAN LOWRY](#)

Beyond the feel-good story of Bob Woodruff's miraculous recovery from injuries he sustained in Iraq, this laudable documentary invites certain niggling questions -- among them a) Why it takes the Olympics to prompt networks to pay attention to faraway lands like China; and b) Does one good effort under the "Primetime" banner compensate for all the "Crime," "Outsiders" and other fluff that network news divisions dole out during primetime? Setting those matters aside, Woodruff delivers a sharp if by necessity once-over-lightly look at how intricately woven the Chinese and U.S. economies have become.

Having begun his ABC News career during the Tiananmen Square uprising -- Woodruff taught law there to Beijing students -- the correspondent makes good use of his fluency in Mandarin as he documents China's commitment to lifting its populace out of poverty and the huge strain that it's placing on global resources. To illustrate the point, Woodruff also reports from Angola, Brazil, Cambodia and the U.S., underscoring Chinese's role in propping up a struggling U.S. economy.

Very little is new here -- indeed, Ted Koppel covered much the same ground, in considerably richer detail, during his recent four-part Discovery Channel documentary -- but it's still a snapshot of current geopolitics that receives depressingly short shrift from the major networks. Perhaps most sobering is the observation from one of the analysts interviewed that the world would essentially need a second Earth to accommodate the Chinese's 1.3 billion people should they begin consuming at the same per-capita levels exercised within the United States.

ABC anchor Peter Jennings had embarked upon a series of primetime documentaries prior to his death -- a passing that would be all the more tragic if the broadcast nets' commitment to that genre flickered out with him. And if lighting the Olympic torch has provided a fleeting incentive to keep the primetime docu flame alive, at this point, small victories are better than nothing.

Camera, Ben McCoy; editors, Emily Williams, Peter R. Livingston Jr. Running Time; 60 MIN.

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