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Translated from the French original by Michael Black.

There will figure Patrica Batto's words, published as an insert in print version, reproduced as a chronicle in the present edition.

- 1 That the monopoly of political power is held by one party in China has led to widespread corruption. China's media have not escaped its spread, as with so many other areas of society where corruption has long had a hold and where it continues to spread. Corruption in the media is not limited to the use of public authority to obtain favours, etc; it proliferates in editorial advertising and entirely manufactured news, but in particular through the deliberate concealment by the media of the corruption within. It is only in the last two years that the theme of corruption in the media—despite its being public knowledge—has emerged like the tip of an iceberg in the information organs of the state. Among many examples, there is the case of Li Yuanjiang, former member of the Permanent Party Committee in Canton, head of the Propaganda Department and director of the daily *Guangzhou ribao*¹; the bribes-to-Xinhua journalists scandal for concealment of the facts at the request of the local authorities²; as well as the case of Zhao An, star presenter on China Central Television (CCTV)³.

The spread of editorial advertising

- 2 The duty of the media is to gather and broadcast trustworthy information. The credibility of the media depends on their objectivity, impartiality and even-handedness. The information provided must be real and accurate. For journalists,

attending press conferences and writing articles are part of their basic duties. Apart from the remuneration provided by their employers, journalists and the media should under no circumstances receive and accept payment from anyone who may be the subject of interviews, reports or commentary. As soon as relations between a journalist and his interlocutor go beyond the domain of journalism and become mercenary, the objectivity, accuracy and impartiality of the information exchanged is clearly lost. The media, responsible for providing information in the public interest, become, in such a situation, tools in the service of private interests. For a society's media to not provide the public with accurate, truthful and objective information, is for the media to do a disservice to that society, and a society thus served is a society blinded.

- 3 At present in mainland China, relationships between the media and journalists, and their interlocutors, are the opposite of what they should be. In a situation where backstage deals have become a system, editorial advertising⁴, or “advertorial” as the written copy has become known, has, with quasi official approval, invaded the media. Apart from information about sensitive political subjects, all other information, without exception, can be subject to deals.

“Travel expenses”

- 4 There is a close connection between the development of editorial advertising and the growth of corruption on a system-wide scale. At the beginning of the 1990s, the media were still “bureaucratic units” (*shiye danwei*) financed by a dedicated authority. In these units, apart from salaries and bonuses, reporting expenses were extremely limited. When journalists travelled for professional reasons, their work unit did not reimburse them for the costs of either travel or meals. Consequently, they had become accustomed to asking for these from the work units which they were visiting. The latter, keen to be mentioned in the media, reimbursed journalists for their travel costs, either doing so willingly or bowing to pressure. Thus stories were covered in exchange for meals or travel expenses. Journalists, in exchange for the news disseminated, were paid “meal expenses” and “travel expenses”. Gradually, both parties found it simpler to pay a cash sum. As corruption was becoming widespread in society as a whole, editorial advertising became the norm. All enterprises that organise press conferences, all work units that produce communiqués, pay these “travel expenses”. In the world of the media it is an open secret.
- 5 Some media professionals go so far as to say that mainland Chinese journalists work like “nightclub hostesses”. If one desires the company of a young woman, she must be paid; in the same way, if one wants a journalist to come, he or she must be paid. A journalist's rate is in proportion to their renown. Naturally, famous journalists, like celebrities, are more expensive than ordinary journalists. The rate also depends on one's place in the hierarchy: a journalist's “expenses” are therefore directly proportional to his ranking in the medium that employs him. All administrations have rules for paying the various media appropriately, according to their importance. A journalist from the national media would of course be better paid than a journalist with provincial media.
- 6 A journalist will usually be paid a minimum 100 yuan to travel. Generally there are levels of payment: 200, 300, 500 and 800 yuan; the amount depends on the importance of the host enterprise. Then there are specially commissioned articles, which often cost between one and several thousand yuan. The bosses of some private enterprises pay even more, as in some state enterprises, on the sly. Paying several thousand yuan for an

article of a thousand characters is commonplace. A person known to the author and working in an insurance company once organised a press conference. He was at that time starting out, and with his little experience gave each journalist only 50 yuan. The result: not a single article appeared.

- 7 To make things even more convenient, journalists now do not even need to write the articles. The organisers of press conferences take care of that: they provide several “ready to print” versions of the texts. The journalists and the media choose the version which best suits them for publication.
- 8 In the same way, journalists form little clubs the aim of which is to share certain perks among all their members. So, if a well-paid press conference is being held, all the journalists in the club will be invited. Journalists always travel in the company of a few colleagues who are friends. For attending an ordinary press conference, journalists generally receive 500 to 800 yuan. For a press conference organised for a new product launch, from 1,000 to 2,000 yuan.

The opulence of Chinese journalists arouses the envy of their Western colleagues

- 9 Company bosses anxious to make their products known are far from being the only lovers of editorial advertising. Even more partial to it are administrations and officials (especially those at the local level) wanting to create an event around their political achievements. If the media sing the praises of the countless building sites that are mushrooming all over the country, it is because the information monopoly has made journalists one of the privileged castes in China. Everywhere, a favourable account from the journalists is hoped for, and a negative account feared. Special correspondents are particularly dreaded. To avoid the risk of compromising one’s career, journalists must be treated as distinguished guests. The poorer and more underdeveloped a place is, the more its officials need to become known, the more they need to pride themselves on their political achievements, and of course the more journalists will be venerated. Their presumptuousness then knows no bounds.
- 10 Some foreign journalists posted to Peking comment on how journalists with the major Chinese media are privileged; when covering a story they do not have to even write the articles, they are put up in luxury hotels, are entertained by local officials all day long, and when they leave are given money or other “expenses”. While the country’s transition to a market economy has produced a new nouveau riche on whom journalists rely, the bureaucratic system has indisputably linked journalists closely with high officials. Journalists who have found favour with local high officials toss aside even the most rudimentary professional ethics, and lose all sense of morality. They turn into praise-singers and concealers of the poverty of political power.
- 11 Below is a brief survey of the fees charged in the media for a flattering account of a political leader, according to inside sources in the profession.

Editorial advertising fees charged by some national media (yuan)

Xinhua Agency			
Internal dispatch* praising the leader of a township	20,000	- 30,000	
the leader of a xian (county) or equivalent rank	50,000	- 60,000	
a leader at prefectorial level	80,000	- 90,000	
a leader at provincial or ministerial level	100,000	- 150,000	
China Central Television (CCTV)			
Report praising the leader of a township	200,000	- 300,000	
the leader of a xian (county) or equivalent rank	400,000	- 500,000	
a leader at prefectorial level	600,000	- 700,000	
a leader at provincial or ministerial level	800,000	- 1,000,000	
Ordinary report, per minute	40,000	- 50,000	
For people with contacts, the price falls to	20,000	- 30,000	
The People's Daily (Renmin ribao)			
Internal text* praising the leader of a township	10,000	- 20,000	
the leader of a xian (county) or equivalent rank	30,000	- 40,000	
a leader at prefectorial level	50,000	- 60,000	
a leader at provincial or ministerial level	80,000	- 100,000	
Eulogising text about the commercial sphere, for a half page	200,000	- 250,000	
for a whole page	300,000	- 400,000	

* The Chinese media issue a large number of internal publications intended for cadres of a certain rank. These publications have great influence. See, for example, Wang Heyuan, "A quoi servent les publications internes de l'Agence Xinhua?" (What use are Xinhua's internal publications?), *Perspectives chinoises*, No 5/6, July-August 1992, pp. 10-16. Source: Figures compiled by the author.

- 12 At present, journalists in mainland China are very rich. Private, and expensive, cars abound in the CCTV housing area. Many Chinese journalists also have private villas outside the city or have acquired agricultural land on which to build country houses. Such a lifestyle cannot be explained by "travel expenses" alone, but by their activities as courtiers to the rich. Thanks to the resources linked to their jobs they can organise press conferences, find advertising, set up programmes, arrange appearances on broadcasts, or obtain official authorisations. Thus, during any conference on economics at a national or international level in China, for example, the bosses of large private companies and high-ranking CEOs are always flanked not only by their bodyguards but by journalists. The latter are not on assignment to cover the event, but are public relations officers for the bosses, who they network for among officials and celebrities. Remuneration for these "counselling" and "consultant" activities is substantial. Those in television are even better off: they either set up their own companies, or settle for being counted among the wealthy.

The roots of the systematic corruption of the media

- 13 According to some people, editorial advertising is the result of the transition to a market economy, and the triumph of the laws of supply and demand. Purchasers of editorial advertising are said to need mediatisation in the political and economic fields, which is to say disguised advertising. Now, in China, of all the forms of corruption, the biggest is political corruption; among the many with no sense of shame, the most brazen are the politicians—corruption and impudence are a system in themselves. In actual fact, the real root of the evil—beyond the transition to a market economy brought about by the reforms—lies in the media system of the Communist Party.
- *The Party's spokesmen are inevitably corrupt.* Under the Party's monopoly, it is the Party which finances the media, and bestows jobs and salaries. Consequently media employees provide society with information which conforms to the requirements of the Party. This system does not encourage the independence of journalists or real information; on the contrary, it demands accounts which conform to the directives and tolerates false reports. Entirely fabricated news and the corruption of the media were not born of the reforms; as if the

“records” on which the Maoist era prided itself did not stem from corrupt information! Chinese journalists, employees of the Party, have become used to this role as spokesmen. If they are willing to falsify information in order to provide themselves with a job and a social position, it is in the order of things that they will use the same means to make a quick fortune.

- *The monopoly of power breeds corruption.* In China, all political power, including control of the media, is the monopoly of the Party. All monopoly situations beget privileges, and privileges obviously favour corruption. Under the aegis of the Party, there are no independent media. As a consequence, neither is there any independent group of people responsible for the management of the media. There are only the officials of the Party, responsible for managing the information offices and the major media. The director of China Central Television, just like the directors of the state banks, or the leaders of the provinces and the ministers, is appointed by the Party. Consequently the corruption in the media is no different from that rampant elsewhere: it consists of using public authority for personal profit. The marketing of political power and the private use of public functions have opened up vast prospects for corruption to the privileged caste constituted by the media professionals.
- *Professional ethics are trampled on, and so are the morals of society as a whole.* The moral degeneration of Chinese society obviously affects those who work in the media. Achieving one's ends, without any concern for the means employed, is one of the main explanations for entirely fabricated news stories. Because the media possess the specific power to collect and broadcast information, they have a tremendous capacity to direct and influence public opinion. Consequently the greatest damage caused by corruption in the media is the following: the journalists do not abase only themselves, they are also largely responsible for the extinction of honesty and trust within society. The popular saying “Protect yourself from fire, theft and journalists” is apt evidence of the seriousness of corruption in the media.
- *There is no mechanism for controlling the media.* The media constitute the fourth power, their primary function is to establish the public opinion's control over other powers. But if the media have a watching function, they also should be subject to the control of society. The power of the media must be within the law and in working for the public good; it is essential that their power be subject to regular control by the system and the public. This is an imperative if a society is to work properly. But in China, who could control the media? It would mean keeping an eye on the top leadership. The situation is already virtually unmanageable. The organs of the CCP responsible for ideology produce text after text with which to fight corruption in the media. For example, as early as 1991, the National Association of Media Workers promulgated “Ethical standards for employees in the Chinese media”. Subsequently, at regular intervals of a year or two, all the Party organs responsible for ideology and their associations draw up related standards (*zhunze*) or regulations (*tiaoli*).

- 14 However the constraints imposed by these standards and regulations remain mechanisms which are internal to the sector. Their application depends mainly on an improvement in the ethics of media professionals, who might practise self-restraint and self-discipline. These control mechanisms are devoid of any transparency. Consequently, of all sectors, it is in the media that corruption is least visible. Moreover, the number of cases that come to light are minimised.

No independent media under the watchful eye of the Party

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The greed at Central Television is common knowledge

- 15 Let us look at the Zhao An case as an example. This case caused a national stir. The court reported bribes amounting to 610,000 yuan, and sentenced Zhao to ten years in prison. However, those who followed the scandal closely were all disappointed by the verdict, the general impression being that the affair had been played down.
- 16 First of all, when Zhao An was arrested, the media carried numerous stories of the tens of millions of yuan in cash which had been found during searches at his home. But this turned out to be only 610,000 yuan. The considerable discrepancy between the two figures is puzzling. Secondly, everyone knows that in order to be on any important programme on Central Television, you have to be able to afford it. Zhao An was both director of Central Television's Department of Arts and Letters and producer and star presenter of the top variety shows. In fact, he held the double power of media official and TV star. Is the claim that he received bribes only from Zhang Junyi believable⁵? Thirdly, everyone knows that television is the most influential of the media. Consequently it is the biggest nest of corruption in the Chinese media. The stars of variety shows, enterprise bosses, local officials, any person or enterprise who wants to appear on a television programme must begin by paying more than 10,000 yuan at the very least. It is not in the least surprising that the Zhao An case came to light. The greed among employees of Central Television's Department of Arts and Letters is common knowledge in the world of television. The producers of the big variety shows make fortunes by selling "admission tickets". Another source of enormous personal profits at Central Television is the broadcasting of series at peak viewing times. In general, in order for a series which has not been produced by Central Television itself to be broadcast on prime time, considerable sums have to be paid.
- 17 The media are described as the "fourth power" or the "conscience of society". They are responsible for controlling political power. But in China, the fourth power is rotten, the

conscience of society has been devoured by the lure of power and money. The media do not control political power, they are a party to it, and their employees form a privileged caste. It is thus no surprise at all that public office holders, the rich, and the media together agree to deceive the public. At the same time, the world of the media makes sure it looks after its own interests, by taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by its activities and the monopoly system that prevails. It does everything possible to conceal the corruption at its heart and to sing its own praises. Thus, the credits of Central Television's news station provide a typical image of grandeur, of glory and of justice, and programmes such as "Investigations and crucial debates" (*Jiaodian fangtan*), "News Investigations" (*Xinwen diaocha*), or "Ethical Viewpoint" (*Daode guancha*) claim as their main objective the uncovering of the dark sides of society; but not yet has there been a programme on the shadowy areas of the world of the media. In other words, in the Chinese media, the most serious manifestation of corruption lies not so much in the existence of editorial advertising, as in the fact that its existence cannot be headline news.

NOTES

1. Li Yuanjiang, editor-in-chief and director of the *Guangzhou ribao* (Canton Daily), was accused of having received under the table payments totalling 1.01 million yuan, notably in the purchase of printing equipment. See "Corruption trial charges contested by editor", *South China Morning Post*, February 13th 2004, p. A5. In 2003, the *Guangzhou ribao* claimed a circulation of 1.6 million copies; the press group to which it belongs has the highest advertising revenues in the country: 1.3 billion yuan in 2003. [Editor's note]
2. The scandal involved eleven journalists, four of whom worked for the Xinhua press agency and the other seven for local newspapers. They had agreed to downplay an accident in a goldmine in Shanxi province, in exchange for 74,640 yuan from the mine's owners, in collusion with the local authorities. Only two deaths had been reported, as more than ten deaths would require the opening of a detailed enquiry. Following complaints from villagers, a further 38 bodies were discovered. See "Cover-up of mine disaster shakes Xinhua", *South China Morning Post*, September 28th 2003, p. 6. [Editor's note]
3. Zhao An led the Chinese New Year eve variety programme broadcast by Central Television, which has one of the largest audiences of the year. Accused of having received 600,000 yuan from the artist Zhang Junyi, he was sentenced on December 12th 2003 to ten years in prison. Zhang Junyi was sentenced to six years in prison. See *Kaifang zazhi* (Open), January 2004, pp. 53-59. [Editor's note]
4. Editorial advertising in the Chinese press consists of articles which appear to be normal, but which in reality promote a product or a person, and the publication of which is paid for by the promoters. Editorial advertising affects all the media, including television. [Editor's note]
5. See note 3.