THE EDITORIAL LINE OF MEDIA COMPANIES:
A TABOO BEING RARELY DISCUSSED

Press freedom and individual freedom of speech are closely linked to democracy. Authoritarian governments and dictatorship are the antithesis of them. How can an independent media survive in a country existing under the authoritarian government or dictatorship? Probably not all the money in the world to finance that independency will help. Sooner or later, new government regulations and coercitive measures will escalate and become threats. They, in turn, will openly get converted into violent situations and prohibitions acting against the media.

These situations seem to be an important factor in daily struggles initiating by international organizations for press freedom all over the world. In Latin America, the Interamerican Press Association (IAPA) and different local institutions monitor these situations on a daily basis and inform their governments when the former arise.

Freedom of speech being considering as not only as freedom of citizens but also as freedom a news promoted by media companies, seems to be something that provides with editorial stances. In any democracy a news media company has its right to publish whatever it wants if, at least, it does not go beyond certain legal limits (i.e. they can not libel, and all denounces must be proven). These mitivations are carried by ethical principles and financial independence of media along with acceptance of the audience on what is going to be published. Probably the case of Charlie Hebdo following its mocking of islamism is a clear example. Within this kind of freedoms the editorial line starts to be moulded.

What we have to be clear about is that an editorial line is not attached to a certain political ideology and seems to be observed wider. Even publications aligned to authoritarian regimes are focused on issues that go beyond politics. Any news company have their editorial politics on issues like abortion legalization, homosexual marriage, freedom of religion, euthanasia, use of genetically modified seeds, etc.
Every newspaper makes compromises about its ethical code so that to provide their readers with honest information, professional responsibility and open discussions on the main issues. This means that they have their editorial politics being as a would-be pros and cons on certain issues.

The editorial politics is part and parcel of the media world. This is neither bad nor good but seem to be a matter of a fact. When journalists look for a job, they have to be aware of that. Does this implies that journalism is not a pure and altruist profession but biased? The above connotations more likely mean that there exist as many editorial positions as opinions on a certain issue, and they are a part of our profession.

Some more debates win room here, mostly on a personal level. Do I feel comfortable when working for a newspaper/magazine/radio/TV station/blog whose editorial line is right-wing, neonazi, left-wing, filosionist, progresist? May I work for a company that stands up in favor of a polluting industry, if I am an ecologist or do have green thoughts? Am I a journalist with a social thought who is interested in development issues, how to improve people’s life, how to get clean water for everybody, better conditions for health and education? May I work then for a business magazine which focus is strictly free market stories?

Each specific situation generates, one way or another, the question.

When people start looking for a job in journalism, they do not go so deep in the subject. They wish to learn in the field, beyond the knowledge the university provided, they wish to work in something they like and on what they have earned their degree, and unless that editorial line would be absolutely and openly against their thoughts, everybody accepts the editorial line.

In Argentina, Página/12, the newspaper, was born as a progressist media, assuming human rights as their cause. In recent years, when the governments of Néstor Kirchner and then his wife and current president Cristina de Kirchner took the human rights defense as their own battle, Página/12 got closer to the government. Does this affects my opinion about this newspaper being considered as pro-governmental? I have to ask myself, if I am interested in working in a newspaper that many people in Argentina are critical? Perhaps, it is better to work for La Nación, a more traditional and older newspaper, critical to the government, but identified with agro businessmen (who Argentine trotskists call them «oligarchs»)?

I will choose Página/12 because I still like their editorial line.

Currently in Argentina there is a fierce battle between the largest circulation newspaper in the country, Clarín, and the government. Squirmishes between both of them take place every day. People who is critical to the government thinks of Clarín as the last stronghold defending
the press freedom. People who backs the government thinks that Clarín lies in most of its coverage.

The editorial line also is present in the sources we interview to write our articles. Do we always include in our stories opposite opinions in order to have a balanced article?

The editorial line may be also related to financing. Media company are not altruist companies. They have to pay rents, salaries, social costs, the paper to print, communications, etc and they need earnings to grow and go on.

The editorial line is part of daily reality for mass media companies. But it is also true that in this world of grey tones... everything is more subtle than what is detailed above. So, not all the times the editorial line is so clear as well as the defense of certain interests, being them political or economic ones.

We, as journalists, have to be prepare to changes in editorial lines of the companies where we work. An excellent article about that, from inside, explains why the British newspaper The Guardian supported the Irak invation, and the controversies it generated not only among its readers but in the newsroom.

http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/feb/09/iraq

So, as a conclusion, as in every situation in life, we have to opt, choose. And in the professional life, we also have to chose. If I can not accept anything of the above, because I can not accept anybody’s editorial line, and can only follow my thoughts, then I can see only two roads, either to leave journalism or to look for resources and economic means so as to be myself my own master and decisor maker of the editorial line. But... be prepared! That will be your editorial line. May be when you’ll be looking for journalists not all responses will be positive.

Zhang Kai

CNINA MODEL AND NEWS DISCOURSE SELECTION

I. China’s Puzzle in her International Journalism

More than 35 years reformation and opening to the world, China has successfully found a proper way for its development which is known as «China Model!». This model is based on both the world and Chinese experiences, and suggests a systematic approach to national structure and development.

Along with the national development, China’s media have spared no efforts in trying to improve their news while reporting in the past more than 30 years. China news media have demonstrated dramatic changes