



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

*A biweekly update of press freedom and censorship news
related to the People's Republic of China*

Issue 98: December 17, 2013

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PHOTO OF THE WEEK: EQUAL SMOG FOR ALL!



BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS



Many U.S. reporters face expulsion at year's end

Some two dozen foreign journalists are facing the expiration of their visas and de facto expulsion from China on December 31 as part of an unprecedented campaign by the Chinese government to punish entire outlets for investigative reporting on senior Communist Party leaders and their families. The authorities' refusal to grant or renew visas to the *New York Times* and Bloomberg News in particular would gut their mainland Chinese bureaus (see CMB No. [97](#)). Both outlets' websites have been blocked in China since they reported on Chinese leaders' family wealth in 2012. *Time* magazine's Beijing bureau chief, Hannah Beech, noted in a December 11 article that in previous cases, only individual reporters have been punished with visa delays or denials for covering topics deemed sensitive to the authorities, whereas this year Beijing has targeted whole publications. In an e-mail exchange with the *China File* blog published on December 7, a *New York Times* reporter said the annual renewal of that paper's press cards, documents that serve as a prerequisite for renewing journalist visas, had stopped around November 13—the day that the *Times* exposed business links between U.S. financial firm JP Morgan Chase and Wen Ruchun, daughter of former Chinese premier Wen Jiabao. Those who obtained press cards prior to that date and submitted the required documents for a visa renewal were reportedly told by officials at the Public Security Bureau that it was impossible to proceed with their applications. According to the *Washington Post*, visa renewals have so far been withheld from its two China-based reporters, nine with the *New York Times*, and 14 at Bloomberg. With the December 31 deadline approaching, U.S. vice president Joe Biden publicly denounced the pressure on foreign media during a recent visit to Beijing. He reportedly raised the issue multiple times in private meetings with China's top leaders, including President Xi Jinping. On December 8, a *Washington Post* editorial suggested introducing more “symmetry” into U.S. visa policy toward Chinese applicants if the exclusion of U.S. journalists continued. In a move to silence discussion among Chinese netizens, a Chinese reporter's post about Biden's comments on visa denials was deleted by the microblogging platform Sina Weibo.

- *Time* 12/11/2013: [Foreign correspondents in China do not censor themselves to get visas](#)
- CPJ 12/12/2013: [Covering China goes far beyond the current visa woes](#)
- *China File* 12/7/2013: [Will China shut out the foreign press?](#)
- *Washington Post* 12/5/2013: [Biden forcefully complains to Chinese leaders about crackdown on foreign news media](#)
- *Washington Post* 12/8/2013: [China's strong-arm tactics toward U.S. media merit a response](#)
- China Media Project 12/10/2013: [Posts on Biden China visit deleted](#)



Another professor dismissed for criticizing one-party rule

Zhang Xuezhong, an outspoken legal scholar at Shanghai's East China University of Political Science and Law, confirmed on December 11 that the school had fired him for his online writing about China's political system. Zhang had published articles on the internet calling for more civil rights and political reform, and an online book entitled *New Common Sense*, in which he challenged the legitimacy of the ruling Chinese Communist Party. He was told by the law school's dean on December 9 that his contract would be terminated at the end of the month. Zhang had been barred from teaching since mid-August, and the law school's human resources officials asked him in November whether he would acknowledge his supposed mistakes. "I said I did nothing wrong, so there's nothing to admit to," the professor told Reuters. Zhang's dismissal was seen as the latest example of Beijing's widening crackdown on dissent, and followed the sacking of liberal Peking University economist Xia Yeliang in October (see CMB No. [95](#)). East China University reportedly has cooperative relationships with many foreign schools, including the University of Maryland. There was no immediate response from these institutions to Zhang's dismissal.

- **Telegraph 12/10/2013: [Fresh fears of crackdown as Chinese professor is fired for 'criticising Xi Jinping'](#)**
- **Reuters 12/11/2013: [China professor says sacked for criticizing president and not recanting](#)**
- **South China Morning Post 12/10/2013: [Zhang Xuezhong, pro-democracy activist, sacked by university](#)**



Journalists detained on bribery charges

The Beijing-based financial news outlet *Caixin* reported on December 12 that the authorities had detained two journalists in the capital for allegedly taking bribes to run stories. One of the two, technology editor Xiong Xiong of the Communist Party-owned *Beijing Youth Daily*, was accused of collecting more than one million yuan (\$165,000) in exchange for articles designed to help or hurt various companies or individuals. In a separate case, Yang Kairan, an editor of *Jinghua Times'* automobile news section, was reportedly taken into custody on similar charges in August. That investigation has since expanded to include multiple reporters and public-relations companies. Radio Free Asia cited industry sources as saying that bribery of the type alleged in the two cases is extremely common, suggesting that some additional factor lay behind the arrests. Many private businesses, state-owned enterprises, and local governments employ public-relations firms to broker the placement or deletion of news and commentary, with rival groups looking to damage one another. The arrest of a journalist could represent an escalation of such conflicts, or simply a means of silencing honest but critical business reporting (see CMB No. [95](#)).

- **Radio Free Asia 12/13/2013: [China holds editors over bribery claims](#)**
- **Caixin 12/12/2013: [Two more journalists held over bribe-taking](#)**
- **South China Morning Post 12/12/2013: ['Beijing Youth Daily' editor arrested for taking bribes: report](#)**



State media tout ‘benefits’ of smog

In an attempt to put a positive spin on China’s notorious air pollution, editor Wang Lei published a December 9 article on the website of state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) that identified “surprising benefits” from the haze. According to the article, the pollution created solidarity among Chinese people and increased equality, as both rich and poor faced the same problem. It also heightened awareness of the cost of economic development, Wang argued, and made Chinese people both more humorous—exchanging smog-related jokes—and more knowledgeable about the science of weather and chemistry. Netizen reactions to the article ranged from mockery to dismay. “Smog brought us equality. Thank you for bringing justice to China,” one user wrote. “What’s wrong with the author?” asked another. The Communist Party’s *Global Times* similarly published an editorial on December 10 that described how air pollution could be a defensive advantage for the Chinese military. Meanwhile, on the microblogging platform Sina Weibo and the popular mobile messaging application WeChat, netizens circulated photos of their cities draped in smog during a particularly intense week of pollution that led to flight delays and school closings in cities like Shanghai. Meng Fei, an outspoken television host, argued in a Weibo post that the government bears the most responsibility for the problem. According to Global Voices, the post was shared over 130,000 times and received 40,000 comments. Searches by *China Media Bulletin* editors on December 17 found that both the *Global Times* article and Meng Fei’s post had been removed.

- *Time* 12/9/2013: [China: Here are some great things about toxic air](#)
- CCTV 12/9/2013: [王磊：雾霾让中国人更平等团结幽默 \[Wang Lei: Smog makes Chinese people more equal, more unified, and more humorous\]](#)
- *Guardian* 12/10/2013: [Chinese media find silver linings in smog clouds](#)
- Global Voices 12/9/2013: [Photos: Heavy smog chokes China](#)

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Activist Xu Zhiyong indicted for ‘disturbing order’ online

An attorney for prominent civic activist and lawyer Xu Zhiyong said on December 9 that Xu had been formally indicted on charges of “gathering a crowd to disturb public order” both offline and in the “public spaces” of the internet. Xu, detained since July, is a founder of the New Citizens Movement, which calls for reforms related to government transparency and the rule of law (see CMB No. [91](#)). The movement had gained traction in early 2013 by organizing a series of small street demonstrations calling on government officials to disclose their wealth. The charges against Xu are based on his involvement in organizing the protests themselves, but also on his online dissemination of photographs from the events. The latter allegation stems from judicial guidelines issued in September that define the online world as a public space for the purpose of criminal prosecution (see CMB No. [93](#)), among other innovations. The guidelines have been criticized by rights groups for providing a legal foundation for the authorities’ ongoing crackdown on dissent in social media.

Although President Xi Jinping has pledged to fight official graft, the leadership has repressed grassroots anticorruption activity as a threat to its authority. Dozens of members of the New Citizens Movement are believed to have been detained since March. On December 5, it was reported that Xu's ally Wang Gongquan, in detention since September, had recorded video statements to the police, confessing to disturbing public order and pledging to "sever the relationship" with Xu if "that is what the authorities want." The increased use of video confessions by outspoken government critics, some of which have been shown on state television, has renewed concerns about coercion and the mistreatment of suspects in custody.

- *Wall Street Journal* 12/20/2013: [A new tack in criminal prosecution of Chinese activists](#)
- *Radio Free Asia* 12/9/2013: [Chinese anti-graft activist to stand trial for 'disturbing public order'](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 12/5/2013: [Rights advocate Wang Gongquan latest to give video confession](#)
- *Washington Post* 12/13/2013: [Chinese prosecutors file charges against leading activist Xu Zhiyong](#)



Netizen sues police for detention over criticism of Mao-era soldiers

A Guangdong-based blogger named Zhang Guanghong has sued the authorities in the province's capital, Guangzhou, after they detained him on the accusation of spreading harmful "rumors" on the microblogging platform Sina Weibo. According to Radio Free Asia, Zhang on August 27 reposted his friend's criticism of a group of Communist soldiers known as the "Five Heroes of Langya Mountain," who are praised in Chinese textbooks for their exemplary resistance against invading Japanese troops. The post, which challenged the official account and asserted that the soldiers had "bullied and oppressed" local civilians at Langya Mountain, was shared 2,500 times and drew 300 comments before it was removed by censors. Zhang said he was soon visited by three police officers, who confiscated his computer and held him in custody for seven days. He told Radio Free Asia on December 3 that he believed he had been punished in retaliation for his previous online comments about deaths in police custody, with the Langya issue serving as a pretext. During the trial of his lawsuit on December 11, Zhang challenged the authorities to demonstrate that his repost was factually inaccurate or had disturbed social order. He reportedly asked, "Are the police making decisions based on primary school textbooks?" A verdict in the case has yet to be issued. The Communist Party has continued to promote the improbable feats of Mao-era model soldiers and revolutionary heroes despite growing skepticism and mockery from netizens (see CMB No. [50](#)).

- *Radio Free Asia* 12/3/2013: [Chinese tweeter held for 'defaming' Communist heroes sues police](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 12/12/2013: [Guangdong blogger sues police over punishment for spreading rumours about war heroes](#)



Anticensorship tools removed by Apple, infiltrated by censors

U.S. technology giant Apple reportedly removed FreeWeibo, an application allowing users to access censored postings on the microblogging platform Sina Weibo, from its Chinese online app store on December 13. The company's App Review Board said FreeWeibo was pulled because it violated local laws, but the software's developers told reporters that they believed Apple was acting on orders from Beijing. FreeWeibo was a joint project of Radio Netherlands Worldwide and Chinese activists. Apple has a record of similar removals, having pulled two other apps from its Chinese app store in April and October that allowed access to otherwise blocked Chinese-language content (see CMB No.86). The Chinese market has become increasingly important for the company, which collects nearly \$5 billion in revenue there each quarter. It is currently finalizing an agreement to sell its iPhone device through China Mobile, the country's largest wireless carrier. The Chinese authorities have used a variety of means to thwart anticensorship efforts. Operators of Lantern, a free peer-to-peer circumvention tool funded by the U.S. State Department, confirmed on December 11 that Chinese censors had infiltrated and partly blocked its servers. This occurred within days of international media reporting a surge in Chinese netizens using Lantern. Operating on a trust network, Lantern allows users in countries with free internet access to share their bandwidth with users in censored countries so they can access blocked web content. The service's developers said they would tighten the invitation process to screen out censors and make it more resistant to blocking.

- Agence France-Presse 12/13/2013: [Apple blocks anti-censorship 'FreeWeibo' app in China](#)
- Apple Insider 12/13/2013: [Apple pulls another anti-censorship app from China's iOS app store](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 12/12/2013: [Anti-firewall tool Lantern infiltrated by Chinese censors](#)
- Tech in Asia 12/11/2013: [China blocks censorship circumvention software Lantern after a surge of Chinese users](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 12/4/2013: [US-funded Lantern program allows Chinese to dodge Great Firewall and view banned websites](#)

TIBET



Singers, poet jailed for works addressing repression, Tibetan identity

According to the Dharamsala-based Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD), the Chinese authorities recently sentenced nine Tibetans in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) for “engaging in activities to split the nation” and maintaining contact with the “Dalai clique”—a derogatory term used by the Chinese Communist Party for the Tibetan government in exile and more generally for followers of Tibet's spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. The nine cases occurred in Driru (Biru) County, Nagchu (Naqu) Prefecture. Among those sentenced was a writer named

Topden, known by the pseudonym Dro Ghang Gah, who was detained in October and sentenced to five years in prison on November 30. TCHRD reported that Topden may have been punished for writing a poem that described Beijing's recent brutal crackdown in Driru County (see CMB No. [95](#)), as well as government repression in the area in 1969, during which thousands of Tibetans were mistreated, jailed, or killed. Separately, on December 6, the *Tibet Post* reported that two popular Tibetan singers from Driru County had been arrested in November for performing politically sensitive songs. The authorities detained Trinley Tsekar in Driru County on November 20 after he released a number of albums that praised Tibetan identity. Another singer, Gonpo Tenzin, who had put out an album entitled *No Losar for Tibet*, was detained on November 30 in Lhasa on unknown charges. Many Tibetans have boycotted annual celebrations of Losar, the Tibetan New Year, as a form of passive protest against Chinese Communist rule. The authorities regularly arrest and imprison Tibetan singers, writers, and other cultural figures who promote Tibetan identity or address official repression in the region.

- *Tibet Post International* 12/4/2013: [Writer among nine Tibetans sentenced to prison in Tibet](#)
- *Tibet Post International* 12/6/2013: [Two popular singers arrested over alleged political songs for Tibet](#)

BEYOND CHINA



Foreign scholars, analysts attend Shanghai gathering to discuss China Dream

In an apparent effort to add international legitimacy to President Xi Jinping's "China Dream" political slogan for domestic audiences, the Chinese State Council Information Office hosted a December 7–8 international symposium on the concept, which generally refers to Chinese national rejuvenation under Communist Party rule (see CMB No. [90](#)). The Communist Party mouthpiece *People's Daily* claimed that some 100 scholars and experts from more than 20 countries, including the United States, Britain, France, and Japan, attended the event (see CMB No. [95](#)). Kenneth Lieberthal, an expert on U.S.-China relations from the Brookings Institution, was among the participants. Others included Robert Lawrence Kuhn, an American corporate strategist and investment banker who has also served as an adviser to Chinese leaders and a columnist for the state-run media outlet *China Daily*; Maria Cristina Rosas, a Mexican professor of international relations; and Gustaaf Geeraerts, the director of the Brussels Institute of Contemporary China Studies. Attendees gave speeches offering their interpretation of the China Dream, mostly matching the authorities' emphasis on economic development rather than political liberalization. Some praised it as a reform model for their own countries, or as a vision for a new international order in which emerging powers would have more influence. The texts of the speeches were subsequently published in the *People's Daily*.

- *ChinaScope* 12/12/2013: [China held an international symposium on the China Dream in Shanghai](#)

- *People's Daily* 12/12/2013: [中国梦正在发挥巨大感召力 \[China Dream is making big appeal\]](#)
 - China.org.cn 12/8/2013: [“World Dialogue on Chinese Dream” international symposium](#)
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NOTABLE ANALYSIS



‘Foreign Policy’ reports on cybersecurity threats among Tibetan exiles

Foreign Policy magazine on December 4 published an article on cybersecurity threats in Dharamsala, India—home to Tibet’s spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, and the Tibetan government in exile, also known as the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA). Authored by Beijing-based journalist Jonathan Kaiman, the article maps out various methods that the Chinese government has used to penetrate the city’s internet infrastructure and how the Tibetan government in exile is responding. Besides phishing attempts and other types of cyberattacks that target computers of CTA employees and pro-Tibet activists, the increasingly popular Chinese messaging app WeChat is widely viewed as a new channel that allows the Chinese government to trace communications among Tibetans and prosecute China-based users who send sensitive information abroad, such as photos of Tibetans’ self-immolation protests. According to the report, Dharamsala has become a popular destination for cybersecurity professionals, who come for short stints to assist Tibetan groups and analyze attacks. “What we’re trying to do now is provide more opportunities for Tibetans themselves to become experts in cybersecurity,” one researcher said.

- *Foreign Policy* 12/4/2013: [Hack Tibet](#)

For additional information on human rights and free expression in China, see:

[Freedom in the World 2013](#)
[Freedom of the Press 2013](#)
[Freedom on the Net 2013](#)

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