



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

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BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS

State media criticize U.S. role in Chen Guangcheng case

On May 3 and 4, the Chinese media unleashed a series of opinion pieces that criticized the United States and activist lawyer Chen Guangcheng, who had escaped from extrajudicial house arrest in Shandong Province in late April and taken refuge in the U.S. embassy in Beijing. Following tense negotiations, Chen left U.S. custody for a Beijing hospital on May 2, having been guaranteed freedom and safety within China. But the blind, self-taught lawyer renounced the deal almost immediately, deciding it was too dangerous to stay in China. This touched off new, ongoing talks aimed at allowing him to travel to the United States with his family (CMB No. [56](#)). The state-controlled media had remained mostly silent on the internationally prominent news story until the carefully crafted outburst of commentary began on May 3. The articles avoided detailed reference to the repressive conditions from which Chen had escaped, and instead focused on condemning the U.S. role, Chen himself, and the collapse of the initial agreement. The Communist Party-owned English-language paper *Global Times* called Chen a “tool” used by Western forces to work against China’s political system. The Beijing Communist Party’s *Beijing Daily* targeted U.S. ambassador to

China Gary Locke, accusing him of intentionally plotting to create “social discontent” in China, partly through his humble demeanor over the past year, which had won praise among ordinary Chinese (CMB No. [40](#)). Meanwhile, Phoenix Television reporter Qin Feng, the niece of a former Chinese foreign minister, referred to Locke on her microblog as a “banana”—a derogatory term for assimilated Americans of Asian descent. Her remarks sparked criticism by netizens and were later deleted. An article in the Communist Party mouthpiece *People’s Daily* said China and the United States must “keep their words” to avoid tension. And the *Beijing News*, which until late 2011 had a reputation for relative independence (see CMB No. [33](#)), urged foreign diplomats not to “cross the boundary” and to respect their host country’s culture. However, in a sign that some in the newsroom were unhappy with the paper’s forced position on the Chen case, at around midnight on May 5 someone posted a cryptic apology on its microblog—which has more than 1.38 million followers—seeking forgiveness for the previous day’s party-line editorial.

- *Wall Street Journal* 5/4/2012: [China’s state media break silence: Blind activist is a ‘tool’](#)
- *Want Daily* 5/7/2012: [US ambassador derided as ‘banana’ by Chinese TV reporter](#)
- *Beijing Daily* 5/4/2012 (in Chinese): [Many Beijing media outlets comment on Chen Guangcheng case, criticize Gary Locke as ‘grandstanding’](#)
- China Media Project 5/5/2012: [The Beijing News: a clown with a conscience](#)
- Danwei 5/5/2012: [Clowning around in the media](#)



Al-Jazeera reporter expelled, foreign journalists obstructed

The English-language service of Qatar-based satellite television station Al-Jazeera announced on May 9 that it was being forced to close its Beijing bureau after its only reporter there, U.S. citizen Melissa Chan, was denied an extension of her visa and press credentials and effectively expelled. The station said its requests for visas for alternate reporters went unanswered. The Foreign Correspondents’ Club of China (FCCC) said Al-Jazeera English had angered the authorities by airing a documentary on Chinese labor camps in November 2011, though Chan, who had worked for the network in China for five years, was not involved in the film. According to the FCCC, Chan’s case was the most extreme example in a pattern of growing threats that foreign correspondents’ visas might be canceled. Over the past two years, 27 correspondents reported unusual delays in the processing of visas, and six said they had been explicitly told by the Foreign Ministry that their applications had been rejected or put on hold because of the content of their reporting. Nevertheless, this is the first time in 14 years that a foreign correspondent has been so dramatically expelled. The Communist Party–owned newspaper *Global Times* defended the decision in a May 10 editorial, arguing that Chan had produced programs that were “intolerable for China.” She had previously complained of harassment by Chinese officials (see CMB No. [23](#)), but Al-Jazeera as a whole has been viewed as a source of emulation for Chinese state media seeking to compete on the global stage with U.S. and European news services (see CMB No. [40](#)). Foreign reporters in China have recently encountered increased official pressure as they attempt to cover the case of activist lawyer Chen Guangcheng (see above). Two journalists had their credentials confiscated in Beijing on May 3, and crews from U.S.-based Cable News Network (CNN) and Hong Kong’s i-Cable

Television were forcibly stopped by local security men when they attempted to reach Chen's home village in Shandong Province.

- Associated Press 5/9/2012: [China expulsion of Al-Jazeera reporter criticized](#)
- *Global Times* 5/10/2012: [Chan case not a sign of growing tensions with journalists](#)
- Al-Jazeera 5/8/2012: [Al-Jazeera English forced out of China](#)
- Foreign Correspondents' Club of China 5/8/2012: [Correspondent expelled](#)
- Committee to Project Journalists 5/3/2012: [Chen Guangcheng reporting censored, obstructed](#)
- CNN 5/4/2012: [Visitors unwelcome in Chinese activist's hometown](#)
- i-Cable 4/28/2012 (in Chinese): [i-Cable satellite van kicked while reporting on Chen Guangcheng](#)



Propaganda official to head liberal media group

The Chinese authorities announced on May 3 that former Guangdong provincial propaganda department deputy minister Yang Jian would take on the party secretary position at Guangzhou-based Nanfang Daily Media Group (Southern Daily Media Group). The decision signaled a tighter grip by the Chinese Communist Party on the media conglomerate, which owns some of China's most influential and outspoken news publications. According to Beijing-based *Caixin*, Nanfang's party secretary position, combined with the director position, had usually been held by someone from within the organization. Yang had previously led the Guangdong bureau of the state-run Xinhua news agency and the Guangdong branch of the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT), both known for their prominent roles in advancing Communist Party propaganda and censorship goals. Nanfang's incumbent director and party secretary, Yang Xingfeng, who started as a news reporter at *Nanfang Daily* in 1982, was expected to continue serving as its director. Several Chinese netizens pointed out the irony of the decision, which was announced on World Press Freedom Day. While some microbloggers questioned whether the group's publications would be "readable" in the future, an official at the Hubei provincial propaganda department wrote, "Nanfang Daily Group's public opinion guidance will now be more correct, and more authoritative!"

- China Media Project 5/3/2012: [Change at top media group raises concern](#)
- *Caixin* 5/3/2012 (in Chinese): [Guangdong propaganda deputy minister to lead Nanfang Media Group](#)



Press bribery sweep begins

The General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP), which enforces print media regulations, announced on May 3, World Press Freedom Day, that it would launch a crackdown on "journalistic malpractice" from May 15 to August 15. According to the state-run Xinhua news

agency, media outlets would be ordered to fire reporters who took bribes or extorted money, and to eliminate the practice of carrying advertisements in the guise of news articles. Though these problematic practices are well documented among media in China, past enforcement efforts have been selectively used to target journalists who exposed government malfeasance, in some cases without having been involved in bribery or extortion. For instance, in December 2009, Fu Hua of *China Business News* was sentenced to three years in prison for what were widely perceived to be politically motivated charges of accepting bribes in relation to a story that exposed safety problems in the construction of an airport in northeastern China.

- Reuters 5/3/2012: [China to stamp out journalistic malpractice-Xinhua](#)
 - *Freedom of the Press 2010*: [China](#)
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NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Trading in People's Daily Online shares halted after price surge

The Chinese authorities on May 2 temporarily suspended trading of shares in People's Daily Online, the website of the Chinese Communist Party's official newspaper, which had made its debut at the Shanghai Stock Exchange on April 20 (see CMB No. [55](#)). According to the party-owned *Global Times*, the decision was made in accordance with regulatory rules aimed at "reining in speculative manipulation of share prices." The online portal's stock had soared 91 percent from its initial public offering (IPO) price within two days of trading. Analysts said investors were betting that the company's direct ties to the Communist Party essentially guaranteed profits and growth in China's state-controlled media environment. John Hudson of the *Atlantic* noted that shares in China's leading web portal, the privately owned Sina, have meanwhile fallen steadily, suggesting that as far as the stock market is concerned, "propaganda and censorship are winning out over free speech." Sina and other top Chinese internet firms must comply with and enforce government censorship directives, but their popular social-media platforms nevertheless provide a relatively vibrant alternative to stilted official outlets. With its low readership and poor financial fundamentals, People's Daily Online hopes to use the funds raised through its IPO to catch up with the likes of Sina and expand its global presence.

- *Global Times* 5/3/2012: [Trading of People's Daily Online suspended after stock price soars](#)
 - *Financial Times* 5/3/2012: [People's Daily halted after price soars](#)
 - *Atlantic* 5/3/2012: [China's propaganda IPO bubble](#)
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Dismissing privacy risks, Evernote plans China data center

The California-based Evernote Corporation, which owns the popular online note-taking and archiving tool of the same name, plans to open its first overseas data center in China. In a *Wall Street*

Journal interview published on May 6, Evernote chief executive Phil Libin admitted that China was “the hardest” market to crack, but said the company would begin operating there as soon as it receives regulatory approval, with 30 local employees by year’s end. It currently has 170 employees worldwide. Servers based inside China would presumably improve the application’s performance for Chinese users, as it would not be slowed by the country’s filtering of data from the global internet. However, the Chinese authorities have in the past asked foreign internet companies with a presence in China to provide them with personal user information, some of which was used to persecute dissidents. Libin argued that it would not be “realistic” to say the company could resist such requests, and that “the overwhelming vast majority of people in China aren’t going to care” about exposure to state monitoring and would prefer better service to data security. Unlike foreign social-media sites like Facebook and Twitter, Evernote is not blocked in China, as it is mainly used to store personal notes such as recipes, school work, or news clippings. However, if the service’s note-sharing functions become more popular, it will likely draw more scrutiny from the authorities.

- *Wall Street Journal* 5/6/2012: [Evernote app has eye on China](#)
- *Tech in Asia* 5/6/2012: [Evernote CEO: Prepping to launch in China, will hire 30 local staff](#)
- *BBC* 5/7/2012: [Evernote will set up a data centre in China](#)



Student’s food-safety website earns official praise

On May 8, the state-run *China Daily* ran a laudatory report by the official Xinhua news agency about the food-safety website Zhichuchuangwai (Throw It Out the Window). The site’s popularity has apparently grown in China as news on tainted products continues to emerge, including a recent South Korean report on medicinal capsules imported from China that contained a powder made from human fetuses. The website was created in June 2011 by Wu Heng, a graduate student at Shanghai’s Fudan University, along with 34 other netizens. It features a database of 3,000 news articles on food safety stretching back to 2004, and a map pinpointing the locations of mentioned incidents. There is also a function allowing searches on various types of food and ingredients. Zhichuchuangwai has recorded over 190,000 hits since its launch, and it reportedly crashed temporarily on May 3 due to an overload of traffic. Although the Chinese authorities perceive food safety as a highly sensitive issue, the Xinhua article spotlighted Wu’s efforts, along with descriptions of recent municipal government initiatives aimed at ensuring food safety. Writing on the website not long after its 2011 launch, Wu asserted that the authorities are tolerant when it comes to coverage of food regulations, and that he had not been visited by officials. “The fact that everyone could have access to the site shows that there is progress,” he wrote. The site may be acceptable to officials in part because of its reliance on Chinese media reports, which are themselves subject to censorship, though it also reportedly accepts e-mail submissions from netizens. In the past, similar netizen initiatives that were at first praised by state-run media—such as a site that aimed to reunite abducted children with their parents—have eventually been censored (see CMB No. [12](#)).

- *Tech in Asia* 5/8/2012: [Throw it out the window: Chinese student builds food safety web platform](#)
- *China Daily* 5/8/2012: [Student’s food safety website fuels his fame](#)

- *Want Daily* 5/5/2012: [Shanghai graduate student sets up food safety website](#)
 - *Associated Press* 5/7/2012: [South Korea finds smuggled drug capsules from China containing flesh from dead babies](#)
 - [Zhichuchuangwai](#)
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HONG KONG



Police to ease reporter movements, patriotism classes postponed

Hong Kong police commissioner Andy Tsang Wai-hung announced on May 4 that the official practice of restricting journalists to a designated “media zone” at public events would be applied only under “special circumstances” in the future (see CMB No. [54](#)). The decision was hailed by local media rights groups as a breakthrough, though Hong Kong Journalists’ Association chairwoman Mak Yin-ting said its effectiveness would depend on whether police officers were well informed about the new guidelines. Hong Kong had dropped by one point in Freedom House’s latest annual *Freedom of the Press* report, released on May 1, due in part to the government’s unprecedented measures to limit reporters’ access to key events in 2011, especially during a visit by Chinese vice premier Li Keqiang in August. In another small victory for freedom of information in the territory, Hong Kong education secretary Michael Suen Ming-yeung announced on April 30 that mandatory “national education” classes, which have been criticized as a bid to brainwash students with Chinese patriotism, would be introduced in 2015 instead of September this year. Under the proposal, primary and secondary students would be required to take 50 hours of lessons a year, with a focus on “building national harmony, identity and unity among individuals.” Suen said on May 2 that teachers, who are to be trained on the new courses in mainland China, would be free to teach students about the “dark side” of the mainland as well. But key topics such as the Cultural Revolution and the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre have already been excluded from the curriculum.

- *South China Morning Post* 5/5/2012: [Police to ease restrictions on media's movements](#)
 - *Agence France-Presse* 4/30/2012: [Hong Kong delays China patriotism lessons](#)
 - *Standard* 5/3/2012: [Schools may take look at national ‘dark side’](#)
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BEYOND CHINA



China firm mulls U.S. theater buy, ‘Hunger Games’ cleared for release

The *New York Times* reported on May 7 that U.S.-based AMC Entertainment, North America’s second-largest movie theater chain, was in talks to “sell the company” or at least a “significant stake” in it to the Chinese theater owner Wanda Group. The deal, if completed, would create an outlet for

Chinese films in the United States, where audiences have given cool receptions to movies such as *The Beginning of the Great Revival* (also known as *The Founding of a Party*), a state-subsidized propaganda epic released last year about the origins of the Chinese Communist Party. According to the company website, Wanda, which owns numerous commercial properties including luxury hotels and department stores, has 86 theaters across 40 Chinese cities that account for 15 percent of the country's annual ticket sales, and is planning a major domestic expansion. Meanwhile, as Hollywood seeks to increase its presence in the Chinese market (see CMB No. [56](#)), California-based Lions Gate Entertainment announced on May 5 that its sci-fi movie *The Hunger Games* had won approval for distribution in China from China Media Group, the official gatekeeper for imported films and coproductions with foreign companies. The *Wall Street Journal* commented that the decision “comes as somewhat of a surprise,” since the film—set in a dystopian future dominated by an oppressive government—carries antiauthoritarian messages.

- *New York Times* 5/7/2012: [AMC said to be talking to Chinese buyer](#)
- Wanda Film: [About us](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 5/7/2012: [‘Hunger Games’ hopes for China appetite](#)
- Bloomberg 5/5/2012: [Lions Gate wins approval for ‘The Hunger Games’ in China](#)

U.S., China plan cybersecurity cooperation

At a May 7 press conference at the Pentagon in Washington, DC, U.S. defense secretary Leon Panetta and Chinese defense minister Liang Guanglie said the two sides had agreed to increase cooperation on cybersecurity issues to avoid miscalculations—such as improper attribution of hacking attacks—that could lead to future bilateral crises (see CMB No. [43](#)). According to the Associated Press, experts have found that about 12 different Chinese groups, largely backed or directed by the Chinese government, are responsible for the bulk of cyberattacks aimed at stealing sensitive data from American companies and government agencies. However, Liang firmly rejected the idea that the attacks on the United States were coming directly or exclusively from China.

- Associated Press 5/8/2012: [U.S., China to cooperate more on cyber threat](#)

For additional information on human rights and free expression in China, see:
[Freedom in the World 2012](#)
[Freedom on the Net 2011](#)
[Freedom of the Press 2011](#)

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