








CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

Issue No. 61: June 21, 2012

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BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS



State media tout China's first female astronaut

Newspapers across China have devoted extensive coverage to Liu Yang, who on June 16 became the country's first female astronaut in space. Along with two male colleagues, she participated in China's first manned mission to feature a docking exercise in orbit. Liu's media prominence contrasted sharply with the treatment of her male predecessors, whose backgrounds were usually kept secret before their missions. Besides her emphasis on gender equality in the workplace, Liu, a military pilot, repeatedly told the media that she was grateful to her home country and the Chinese people, effectively making the space mission a patriotic campaign. A Shenzhen-based newspaper reported that in an English-language exercise, she once declared, "As a female pilot, the sacred rose garden in my heart is the motherland's blue sky." On its website, the state-run newspaper *China Daily* featured an online photo album of Liu. The official Xinhua news agency also published uplifting interviews with her family and high school teachers. *Want Daily* reported on June 19 that a headshot of Liu in a space suit, published by Xinhua, appeared to have been modified from an original of Liu wearing her air force uniform. State media have been known to manipulate coverage of the space program,

which is seen as an important propaganda tool. In September 2008, Xinhua was caught publishing a prefabricated report on a space mission, including in-flight messages from the astronauts, before their spacecraft had even set off. In May 2010, a senior Xinhua official told a group of journalism students that the dramatic emergence of China's first man in space, Yang Liwei, from his capsule after landing in 2003 had been staged for the cameras, as his face was initially covered in blood from a minor injury he suffered during reentry.

- *Daily Beast* 6/15/2012: [China's first female astronaut, Liu Yang, ready to blast off](#)
- *China Daily* 6/15/2012: [China's first female astronaut meets media](#)
- Baidu News 6/13/2012 (in Chinese): [Shenzhou IX female astronaut Liu Yang](#)
- BBC 6/17/2012: [China morning round-up: Shenzhou-9 space module to dock](#)
- *Want Daily* 6/19/2012: [Xinhua picture of Liu Yang appears to be doctored](#)
- *Telegraph* 9/26/2008: [China fakes reports from space](#)
- *New York Times* 6/3/2010: [In leaked lecture, details of China's news cleanups](#)



Media payoffs pave way for Chinese IPOs, report finds

Buying media silence or glowing reviews is a common first step toward an initial public offering (IPO) in China, according to *Caixin*, a liberally minded Beijing-based publication known for its investigative reporting. In an in-depth article published on June 7, the paper outlined how public-relations firms and IPO-bound companies spend billions of dollars every year to pay off media outlets, internet portals, and search engines to ensure that negative information—whether true or not—remains out of sight. The phenomenon has reportedly been documented by the China Securities Regulatory Commission, but officials quoted said the agency has been powerless to stop it. In some cases, media outlets or editors initiate the transaction, threatening to publish negative news unless they receive payment. In other instances, PR firms may be actively working to cover up problematic episodes in a company's history. In a follow-up opinion article published in the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post*, *Caixin* editor Hu Shuli said such conduct is part of a larger ethical deficit, arguing that most “media practitioners on the mainland have largely lost their moral compass and tend to put money first.” She also blamed flaws in the IPO application system, under which even reasonable past behavior could disqualify a company. In a related development, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on June 7 that since April, the Chinese authorities have been clamping down on the public availability of financial information on file with the State Administration of Industry and Commerce (SAIC), which investors use to evaluate companies. The government said the aim was to protect the privacy of companies and individuals, but some observers speculated that it was a response to recent incidents in which SAIC documents were used to expose fraud among Chinese firms listed on international stock exchanges.

- *Caixin* 6/7/2012: [Road show media bandits squeeze IPO hopefuls](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 6/14/2012: [Mainland media must clean up its act](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 6/7/2012: [China's plugging of corporate information sieve: Why it matters](#)



State TV airs gourmet show amid food safety concerns

A richly produced documentary series that explores China's culinary heritage has recently emerged as a major draw for state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV), which is known for its dutiful Communist Party propaganda. Since its premiere in May, *China on the Tip of the Tongue* (also known in English as *A Bite of China*) has reportedly attracted 30 percent more viewers than programs that typically run in its time slot. CCTV is seeking global distributors to air it in English, Russian, and Arabic. Though the program has been viewed more than 20 million times online, some Chinese netizens accused CCTV of attempting to divert public attention from food-safety issues. Wu Heng, founder of the popular food-safety website Zhichuchuangwai (Throw It Out the Window), said there were "two Chinas"—one shown on television, and another shown on his site, which features a database of news articles on food scandals (see CMB No. 57). Similar netizen initiatives have been censored in the past, but the government has so far been supportive of Wu's efforts. He reported being visited by Shanghai food-safety officials in May, but said that rather than ordering him to shut down his site, they gave him positive feedback. Another tool similar to Zhichuchuangwai is the "China Survival Guide," an iPhone application that provides daily updates on food issues. It emerged as the top free download in the Chinese version of Apple's online store within three days of its launch in May. Meanwhile, censors reportedly restricted discussion of food safety on the popular Sina Weibo microblogging platform in the days after June 14, when a dairy company based in Inner Mongolia announced the recall of mercury-tainted infant formula. The incident was no doubt deemed "sensitive" because it stirred memories of an infamous tainted-milk scandal in 2008 that left 300,000 infants ill, and touched on volatile issues of pollution, mining, and ethnic identity in the Inner Mongolia region.

- *Wall Street Journal* 6/11/2012: [CCTV Finds the way to viewers' hearts is through gorgeous food documentary](#)
- *Associated Press* 6/16/2012: [Using new media, Chinese try out food activism](#)
- *USA Today* 5/18/2012: [Chinese despair at endless food-safety scares](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 6/18/2012: [Mercury rising: Food scandal disappears from internet](#)

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Activist's suspicious death prompts outcry online and in Hong Kong

Collective action by Chinese netizens yielded another concession from the authorities on June 14, when police in Hunan Province promised an investigation of the suspicious death of labor rights activist Li Wangyang, who was found dead at a hospital in the city of Shaoyang on June 6. Li had been imprisoned for organizing protests during the 1989 Tiananmen Square democracy movement, and as a result of mistreatment he suffered during 21 years behind bars, he was blind, nearly deaf, and severely physically disabled. His condition raised questions about the initial police finding that he had hung himself in his hospital room. A photograph that circulated online seemed to show Li's

body with his feet touching the floor, causing activists to cite it as evidence that the hanging was staged. Netizens noted that just days before his death, Li had given an interview to the Hong Kong-based television station iCable, during which he criticized Beijing's handling of the Tiananmen massacre and vowed to continue fighting for democracy in China even if "they cut off my head." The remarks seemed inconsistent with a suicidal state of mind, and could have triggered a reprisal by the authorities, observers suggested. On June 10, thousands of protesters in Hong Kong—where, unlike in mainland China, public discussion of the 1989 massacre is permitted—rallied to demand an investigation (see CMB No. [60](#)). Though the case received prominent press coverage across the territory, local newspaper *South China Morning Post* reportedly downplayed the story, prompting a backlash by its journalists and senior staff. The paper's recently appointed editor in chief, Wang Xiangwei, is a mainlander who worked for the state-run *China Daily* early in his career (see CMB No. [48](#)). When challenged by a subeditor on the appearance of self-censorship in the Li Wangyang coverage, Wang replied in an e-mail, "I don't have to explain to you anything. I made the decision and I stand by it. If you don't like it, you know what to do."

- *Atlantic Wire* 6/15/2012: [A Chinese dissident's suicide that many don't think was suicide](#)
- CNN 6/15/2012: Report: [Chinese dissident's death under investigation](#)
- *New York Times* 6/16/2012: [China to investigate death of labor activist](#)
- *Globe and Mail* 6/15/2012: [Chinese 'netizens' intervene where judges fail](#)
- Reuters 6/20/2012: [China casts long shadow as Hong Kong paper stands accused of censorship](#)



Apple's digital assistant flunks tests on taboo topics

Users testing an early Chinese-language version of Siri, the voice-controlled artificial intelligence system created by U.S. technology giant Apple for its mobile devices, have found that it fails to respond to questions about the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. According to conversations between a Chinese user and Siri that have circulated online, the system replies to questions about the incident by saying that it cannot find any such appointment or name in its records. An image posted on the *China Digital Times* showed that Siri even fails to provide directions to Tiananmen Square. Though it remains unclear whether the glitches were intentional, the finalized system will likely be affected by China's censorship of internet content, which Siri relies on for much of its information. The developmental version of the Chinese-speaking Siri was unveiled during the Worldwide Developers Conference in San Francisco on June 11. At the gathering, Apple's Mac software engineering chief Craig Federighi urged participants to "get your apps ready for China." According to *Businessweek*, China accounted for 20 percent of Apple's sales in the first quarter of 2012, and is its second-biggest market after the United States.

- *Wall Street Journal* 6/19/2012: [Siri really speaks Chinese — Just don't ask her about Tiananmen](#)
- *China Digital Times* 6/17/2012: [Siri learns Chinese](#)
- *Businessweek* 6/12/2012: [Apple vs. Google: Starkly different China experiences](#)



Ai Weiwei barred from hearing on tax case

Police in Beijing barred prominent Chinese artist and blogger Ai Weiwei from attending a court hearing of his company's lawsuit against the Beijing taxation bureau on June 20. In November 2011, tax officials had ordered his studio, Beijing Fake Cultural Development, to pay 15 million yuan (\$2.4 million) in back taxes and penalties. After an initial administrative appeal was rejected, the studio—legally represented by Ai's wife, Lu Qing—filed a lawsuit in April, accusing the taxation bureau of violating various legal procedures (see CMB No. [54](#)). The entire affair, including Ai's 81 days in arbitrary detention in early 2011, was widely seen as an effort to silence his criticism of the authorities. Lu was allowed to attend the June 20 hearing of the case, but hundreds of supporters and journalists were blocked by police outside the court. The movements of Ai's legal consultant, Liu Xiaoyuan, and other prominent dissidents were also restricted ahead of the hearing. State media have been silent on the lawsuit, but a commentary carried by the Communist Party-controlled *Global Times* on June 18 said the artist's overseas support "is not acknowledged among the majority of Chinese." However, Ai argued that the authorities' repressive measures drew more attention to the case than it would attract on its own. In a related development, a delegation of 10 Chinese state-sponsored editors pulled out of Sheffield Doc/Fest, a documentary film festival held annually in England. Organizers of the June 13–17 event had refused the Chinese embassy's explicit July 12 request to drop two films: *High Tech, Low Life*, about citizen journalists in China, and *Never Sorry: Ai Weiwei*, in which filmmaker Alison Klayman follows Ai over the course of three years as he becomes an outspoken critic of the Chinese government (see CMB No. [47](#)). Chinese authorities regularly attempt to suppress critical content at foreign cultural events (see CMB No. [54](#)).

- *New York Times* 6/20/2012: [Chinese artist is barred from his own hearing](#)
- Reuters 6/20/2012: [China's Ai Weiwei says tax hearing is unfair](#)
- *Guardian* 6/15/2012: [Sheffield Doc/Fest: Our programme will not be censored by China](#)



Popular blogger Han Han launches website on Tencent

Outspoken Chinese blogger and novelist Han Han launched his official website on the popular web portal Tencent on June 11. The website features his online profile, with photos and his personal schedule, as well as an online magazine called *One*, which is run by the same editorial team as *Party*, a short-lived print magazine founded by Han Han in 2010. However, unlike *Party*, which was a collection of essays written by liberal voices such as prominent artist and blogger Ai Weiwei, the new e-journal mainly curates or recommends video and written content from other online sources, without comprehensive text or commentary by the media-savvy blogger. It remains unclear whether Han Han's site will eventually run afoul of online censors, or how closely it may toe the party line, as Tencent is required by law to follow censorship directives from the Chinese government.

- *Tea Leaf Nation* 6/12/2012: [Has China's young Jedi joined the dark side?](#)
- *Tech in Asia* 6/12/2012: [Han Han teams up with Tencent, launches online magazine](#)

TIBET

Singer goes into hiding to avoid arrest

Overseas Tibetan news websites have reported that Phulchung, a popular Tibetan singer based in Ngaba, Sichuan Province, was recently forced into hiding after authorities issued a detention order for him. In early May, the singer had released an album of 13 songs, some of which praise the Dalai Lama, Tibet's spiritual leader, and discuss Tibetan people's hard life under Chinese rule. In one song, Phulchung urges Tibetans to resist China's domination by speaking their native language and "uniting and working together." The singer is only the latest among scores of Tibetan intellectuals and cultural figures who have faced imprisonment in recent years (see CMB No. [59](#)).

- **Radio Free Asia 6/11/2012: [Police hunt Tibetan singer](#)**
 - ***Tibetan Review* 6/13/2012: [Arrest order forces Tibetan patriot singer into hiding](#)**
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BEYOND CHINA

Huawei and ZTE face bribery verdict in Algeria, inquiry by U.S.

On June 6, an Algerian court convicted three executives from the Chinese technology giants Huawei and ZTE, which are among the top five global providers of telecommunications equipment, on corruption charges. The executives—ZTE's Dong Tao and Chen Zhibo and Huawei's Xiao Chunfa—were sentenced in absentia to 10 years in prison, and an international warrant was reportedly issued for their arrest, though China is unlikely to extradite them. They were accused of paying \$10 million to a former employee of the state-owned Algeria Telecom between 2003 and 2006, apparently to gain an unfair advantage against competitors. The firms themselves were also fined and banned from partnering with Algeria Telecom for two years. They denied the charges, but stated that they were taking them very seriously. The case will likely add to mistrust of the companies in other parts of the world (see CMB No. [59](#)). On June 12, two U.S. lawmakers from the House Intelligence Committee sent letters to top executives of Huawei and ZTE, asking for details about their business dealings and relationships with the Chinese government. The request was part of an investigation into how the firms' expansion in the United States may affect national security. Among the topics raised in the letters were ZTE's role in a bribery investigation in the Philippines, its sale of surveillance equipment to Iran, and the responsibilities of Huawei's internal Chinese Communist Party committee. The companies' representatives indicated that they would cooperate in answering the questions. Algeria was rated Not Free and the United States Free in Freedom House's *Freedom of the Press 2012* report.

- **Tech in Asia 6/11/2012: [Huawei, ZTE execs sentenced to ten years for corruption in Algeria](#)**
- **DZ Presse 6/7/2012 (in French): [Case involving Algeria Telecom and the Chinese companies ZTE and Huawei](#)**

- *Businessweek* 6/13/2012: [U.S. lawmakers expand probe to Chinese companies' dealings](#)
 - *Reuters* 6/13/2012: [U.S. lawmakers probe China telecoms for ties, contracts](#)
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Beijing to fund Hollywood film featuring Chinese superhero

As Hollywood studios seek to strengthen their presence in the lucrative Chinese market, they are increasingly acting to accommodate China's official film-industry gatekeepers by curbing negative portrayals and encouraging positive references to the country, its people, and its government (see CMB No. [59](#)). China has also turned to partnerships with the U.S. companies to produce Chinese-themed films that will appeal to international audiences. In keeping with this pattern, a state-backed film fund, National Film Capital, announced during the June 16–24 Shanghai Film Festival that it planned to provide most of the financing for a new Hollywood film about a Chinese superhero, to open in 2014. The character, known as the Annihilator, was invented for the purpose by American comic book legend Stan Lee, who created well-known figures such as the Hulk and Ironman. National Film Capital president Wang Guowei told the *Financial Times* that the character would train in qigong in China before heading to America, and would “rescue the world” in the movie. Speaking at the Shanghai festival, Chinese filmmaker Lu Chuan expressed frustration over his country's censorship of cinema, saying current content rules prevented Chinese movies from competing effectively with Hollywood. As his period drama *The Last Supper* faced approval delays, he urged a more open environment like that in the United States, where movies “can have aliens attacking Los Angeles, even flooding the White House.” However, such openness may be under threat as the two film industries stress cooperation over competition. Discussing the phenomenon with the *Los Angeles Times*, a leading Hollywood producer, who requested anonymity to avoid offending potential Chinese partners, said it was “a clear-cut case—maybe the first I can think of in the history of Hollywood—where a foreign country's censorship board deeply affects what we produce.”

- *Financial Times* 6/19/2012: [China's new superhero: will he fly? China superhero to boost film industry](#)
 - *Los Angeles Times* 6/12/2012: [Hollywood gripped by pressure system from China](#)
 - *Variety* 6/18/2012: [Censors block Lu Chuan film](#)
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Overseas station reports obstruction of access to Chinese programs

New Tang Dynasty Television (NTDTV), a New York–based Chinese-language station established by Falun Gong practitioners, reported on June 10 that it had obtained a copy of a confidential Chinese government notice that instructed media officials to prevent the station from obtaining rights to air Chinese films and television programs. The notice, dated November 17, 2010, is from the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT), China's main broadcast media regulator. It requires provincial and municipal media offices to ensure that Chinese production companies, media outlets, and external third parties with whom they do business do not provide their programming to NTDTV. The document warns that entities found to have provided programs to the station or its affiliates would be subject to punishment. The NTDTV report recalls an

incident that began in February 2012, in which the station was twice forced to cease broadcasts of a popular historical fiction drama after being contacted by a middleman firm from which it had acquired the rights. The firm explained that the Chinese company that originally produced the show had informed it that the “copyright had expired.” Given the newly obtained SARFT notice, NTDTV suspects that the Chinese firm felt obliged to prevent its content from airing on the proscribed network. The cancellations have reportedly upset viewers and resulted in a loss of advertising revenue. NTDTV has long drawn Beijing’s ire due to its ties to the Falun Gong spiritual movement, which is persecuted in China, and its satellite broadcasts of uncensored news (see, inter alia, CMB No. 27). Nevertheless, the new revelations point to the breadth of the Chinese government’s efforts to obstruct independent Chinese media enterprises, even when it comes to apolitical entertainment programming.

- **ChinaScope 6/10/2012:** [Confidential notice: Provide no programming to NTDTV](#)
- **NTDTV 6/10/2012 (in Chinese):** [SARFT issues confidential notice: Chinese Communist Party forces media companies to pressure NTDTV](#)

NOTABLE ANALYSIS



Harvard study reveals censors’ focus on ‘collective action’

On June 18, three researchers at Harvard University’s Institute for Quantitative Social Science released a report entitled *How Censorship in China Allows Government Criticism but Silences Collective Expression*, which revealed that topics that could lead to protests or other forms of collective action were more likely to be censored than those that were simply critical of the authorities. The study was based on an examination of more than 11 million posts made on 1,382 Chinese social media sites. It pointed out that Chinese censorship efforts were by far the largest in the world. Many websites employ up to 1,000 human censors, while the central government oversees as many as 50,000 internet police and up to 300,000 paid commentators. About 13 percent of all social media posts in China are censored, according to the study, and content related to pornography, collective expression or action, or criticism of the country’s internet censorship system is removed at much higher rates than discussions of government policy and other news. In their concluding remarks, the authors suggest that this approach allows the regime to obtain information about public opinion while preventing any direct threats to its hold on power. “With respect to speech,” the study says, “the Chinese people are individually free but collectively in chains.”

- **Harvard University 6/18/2012:** [How censorship in China allows government criticism but silences collective expression](#)
- **Tech in Asia 6/14/2012:** [Harvard report suggests China’s censorship not aimed at suppressing criticism of government](#)
- **Wall Street Journal 6/14/2012:** [New study finds revealing patterns in Chinese internet censorship](#)

Additional information on human rights and free expression in China:
[Freedom on the Net 2011](#)
[Freedom of the Press 2011](#)

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