



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

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Headlines



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PHOTO OF THE WEEK: THE “WATCH BROTHER”



Credit: [Ministry of Tofu](#)

BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS



Wang verdict fails to quash doubts on Bo Xilai saga, political transition

On September 24, state-run Xinhua news agency announced that former Chongqing police chief Wang Lijun had been sentenced that day to 15 years in prison for attempting to defect and for initially covering up the November 2011 murder of British businessman Neil Heywood (see CMB No. [68](#)). Wang had temporarily sought refuge at a U.S. consulate in February 2012, apparently fearing retribution from his boss—then Chongqing Communist Party secretary Bo Xilai—after confronting him with evidence that his wife, Gu Kailai, had killed Heywood. However, two days after the verdict, a blog post by a forensic scientist at China’s top prosecutors’ agency renewed doubts about the official version of events. The expert, Wang Xuemei, pointed out discrepancies in official accounts of the murder and questioned whether Heywood had indeed been poisoned with cyanide, as a tightly scripted report of Gu’s trial claimed. Gu was given a suspended death sentence last month after confessing to murdering Heywood. Wang Xuemei also asked why no one else within Chongqing’s law enforcement agencies was being investigated for aiding in the initial cover-up, given that local specialists handling Heywood’s body would have noticed the distinctive signs of death by cyanide. Wang’s blog post was quickly deleted, but not before it was picked up by international news outlets, which then contacted her by phone. The broader scandal surrounding Bo, who was ousted from the Politburo in the spring, and related infighting may be contributing to a delay in the Communist Party’s planned leadership transition. As of September 27, state media and government officials remained silent on the dates for the 18th Party Congress, long expected to take place in October. They also failed to provide an explanation for the disappearance from public view of Vice President Xi Jinping. Xi, who is set to become the new party leader at the upcoming congress, resurfaced on September 15 after a nearly two-week absence, and has since been attending official meetings as usual (CMB No. [67](#)). According to the *South China Morning Post*, possible snags in the congress plans included the Bo case, Xi’s health, and continued jockeying for power and factional interests. Meanwhile, Chinese and foreign economists have expressed concern that the political logjam is preventing the government from tackling the country’s increasingly menacing economic problems (see CMB No. [62](#)).

- **BBC 9/27/2012: Bo Xilai scandal: [Doubts raised over Neil Heywood death](#)**
- **Associated Press 9/27/2012: [China gov’t expert questions Brit’s cause of death](#)**
- ***Global Post* 9/15/2012: [Chinese leader makes appearance, temporarily dashing hopes for speculative headlines](#)**
- ***South China Morning Post* 9/24/2012: [Party’s silence over 18th congress dates is deafening](#)**
- **Xinhua 9/24/2012: [Wang Lijun sentenced to 15 years in prison](#)**
- ***Wall Street Journal* 9/16/2012: [Behind the party’s silence over Xi Jinping](#)**
- ***New York Times* 9/27/2012: [China politics stall overhaul for economy](#)**



With official urging, Japan books pulled from shelves in Beijing

Amid increased anti-Japanese sentiment in China, driven by the territorial dispute over the Diaoyu Islands, known in Japan as the Senkaku Islands, Beijing authorities have apparently ensured the removal of Japanese books from shops in the city (see below, CMB No. [68](#)). The Japanese newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* reported that at a September 17 meeting, the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Press and Publication urged publishing houses that distribute books by Japanese authors to “unify ideas and grasp a direction,” which the publishers apparently understood as a request to withhold Japan-related books. The meeting was reportedly followed by an official notice posted online that instructed publishers not to translate or release books with Japanese content, though the capital’s press bureau denied issuing such directives. Several large bookstores in downtown Beijing have pulled copies of Japan-related publications. The well-known Wangfujing bookstore, for instance, removed popular Japanese author Haruki Murakami’s *1Q84* from its bestseller shelf on September 21, and a clerk told Britain’s *Guardian* newspaper that the store no longer sold Japanese books. Chinese authorities routinely ban the sale of books that are deemed politically sensitive, leading many mainland readers to go on book-buying excursions to Hong Kong (see CMB Nos. [59](#), [66](#)).

- *Guardian* 9/25/2012: [Japanese books removed from sale by China in row over islands](#)
- *Asahi Shimbun* 9/25/2012: [Japan-related books disappear in Beijing; Chinese demand pay hikes from Japanese employers](#)
- *Christian Science Monitor* 9/25/2012: [Chinese authorities ask booksellers to ban Japanese works](#)

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Dissident writer detained over online Japan comments

Prominent Chinese blogger and former journalism professor Jiao Guobiao was detained by police in Beijing on September 12 for “inciting subversion of state power” after he sharply criticized the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) amid the territorial dispute over the Diaoyu Islands, known in Japan as the Senkaku Islands, in the East China Sea (see above). The Independent Chinese PEN Center, a Chinese literary rights group of which Jiao is a member, noted on September 18 that he had been placed under house arrest on September 6 to prevent him from attending a PEN conference in South Korea. In recent years, Jiao and other independent Chinese writers have been repeatedly barred from attending such gatherings (see CMB No. [31](#)). After the latest travel ban, Jiao published acerbic online commentaries—including a September 11 article on the popular overseas Chinese web portal Boxun—in which he criticized his travel ban and house arrest, and blasted the government for focusing on the Diaoyu dispute instead of much-needed political reform. In one posting on September 8, Jiao sarcastically offered to donate money to help Japan buy both the islands and the CCP’s Zhongnanhai leadership compound in Beijing—a reference to the Japanese government’s recent decision to purchase the islands from a private Japanese owner. In another post, he warned that if Beijing takes possession of the Diaoyus, “they will become another pig sty where it can arbitrarily carry out abuses.” Jiao was fired from his position as a journalism professor

at Beijing University in early 2005 for a series of articles in which he denounced the CCP's propaganda practices.

- *South China Morning Post* 9/19/2012: [Outspoken critic of party faces subversion charges over Diaoyu comments](#)
 - Committee to Protect Journalists 9/18/2012: [Chinese internet writer detained after posting on Diaoyu](#)
 - Radio Free Asia 9/19/2012: [Writer held over Japan comments](#)
 - PEN American Center 9/18/2012: [PEN Member Jiao Guobiao jailed in Beijing on allegations of subversion](#)
 - *China Digital Times* 3/28/2012: [ESWN: Jiao Guobiao's final struggle](#)
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Netizens lead reporting on Foxconn factory riot

After netizens circulated photos of what appeared to be the aftermath of a mass riot, China's largest electronics manufacturer, Taiwanese-owned Foxconn, confirmed on September 24 that some 2,000 workers had been involved in an "incident" the previous night at its factory complex in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province. The company claimed that the unrest began as a personal dispute and was not work related. "According to police, some 40 individuals were taken to the hospital for medical attention and a number of individuals were arrested," the company statement said. Foxconn dismissed rumors that 10 people had been killed in the clashes. On the popular Chinese microblogging platform Sina Weibo, most postings suggested that the rioting was touched off when security guards at the factory beat a worker, leading other workers to seek revenge. One netizen accused Foxconn of oppressing its workers, writing, "Resisting is better than committing suicide"—a reference to a series of high-profile suicides at Foxconn plants, which produce devices for the U.S. technology giant Apple (see CMB No. 44). Some initial reports indicated that searches for "Foxconn" were being censored, but tests by *China Media Bulletin* editors on September 26 found that the term was generating results related to the mass riot on Sina Weibo. The state-run newspaper *China Daily* carried a September 25 article on the riots, quoting a Chinese labor expert who said that Apple has "an inescapable responsibility" for the workers assembling its products in China.

- IDG News Service 9/24/2012: [Mass riot erupts at Foxconn factory in China](#)
 - *Tea Leaf Nation* 9/25/2012: [Widespread fighting erupts at Foxconn factory, possibly spurred by iPhone 5 demand](#)
 - *New York Times* 9/24/2012: [Chinese social media accounts clash with official reports on riot at Foxconn factory](#)
 - *China Daily* 9/25/2012: [40 injured after Foxconn plant clashes](#)
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Official sacked after netizens critique his luxury watches

The state-run newspaper *China Daily* reported that a government official in Shaanxi Province was

dismissed on September 21 for his unexplained possession of luxury items and possible violations of Communist Party disciplinary rules. The Shaanxi Provincial Work Safety Administration chief, Yang Dacai, became notorious on the popular Chinese microblogging platform Sina Weibo in August, when netizens posted photos of him smiling at the scene of a deadly highway collision that killed 36 people. Most users criticized Yang's apparent lack of sympathy, but as netizens turned up more images of the official, their attention was soon diverted to his possession of expensive suits, glasses, and watches reportedly worth tens of thousands of dollars. In a rare move for a Chinese official, Yang apologized on his Weibo account and also in an online chat room on August 29, claiming that he had purchased the watches "using my own legal income," but netizens continued to compile damning photos of his possessions, arguing that officials at his salary level could hardly afford such goods. Chinese authorities initially tolerated online discussion surrounding the official. However, on September 24, *China Digital Times* reported that searches for Yang's nicknames "Watch Brother" and "Watch Uncle"—as well as the name of Shaanxi vice governor Li Jinzhu, who was accused of covering up Yang's corruption—were censored on Sina Weibo. Yang's case was not the first in which internet users have pounced on displays of outsized wealth by government officials. In one example, a popular microblog that collected images of officials wearing luxury watches was censored in September 2011 after initially earning praise from the state-run Xinhua news agency (see CMB No. [34](#)).

- *Wall Street Journal* 9/22/2012: [Time runs out for watch-wearing brother](#)
- *Washington Post* 9/14/2012: [In China, officials' watches get watched](#)
- *China Daily* 9/22/2012: ['Smiling official' sacked, probed](#)
- *China Digital Times* 9/24/2012: [Sensitive words: 'watch brother' and 'watch uncle'](#)
- Ministry of Tofu 8/28/2012: [Official caught smiling at deadly bus crash scene enrages internet vigilantes](#)



Google to shut down China music service

U.S. technology giant Google announced on September 21 that it would shut down its China-only music download service on October 19. Citing Google Music Search's failure to attract users, the company said on its blog that it would transfer resources to other products. The decision marked Google's latest setback in the Chinese market. Google Music Search was launched in 2009, offering free digital downloads of songs that were licensed by international record labels, including Warner Music Group and EMI Group. However, after January 2010, when the company pulled its Chinese-language search engine from the mainland due to censorship concerns and began redirecting Chinese users to an uncensored version in Hong Kong, many mainlanders found Google services cumbersome, with frequent glitches resulting from China's Great Firewall (see CMB No. [60](#)). Moreover, in May 2011, Chinese search-engine giant Baidu launched a similar music service called Baidu Ting (renamed Baidu Music on the day of the Google announcement) that also features deals with record companies to offer free music. Google's clashes with Chinese authorities over censorship have left Baidu in a powerful position, with about 80 percent of the country's internet search market, even though it is known to heavily censor its search results. Google has only about 15 percent, down from a peak of one-third in 2009, though it has reported greater success in areas

other than search, such as mobile-phone operating software and online advertising (see CMB No. [54](#)).

- *Wall Street Journal* 9/21/2012: [Google to shut down China music service](#)
- *Associated Press* 9/21/2012: [Google to shut down China music download service](#)
- *Tech in Asia* 9/21/2012: [Baidu renames music service on the day Google China kills its own](#)



Dissident artist Ai Weiwei unable to travel, loses tax appeal

In an interview with the *New York Times* published on September 25, Chinese dissident artist and blogger Ai Weiwei said his passport was still being kept by the Chinese authorities, leaving him unable to travel abroad for a series of events in the United States and Germany. Ai had planned to leave China in late September for the first survey of his work in North America, set to open at a Smithsonian museum in Washington, DC, on October 7. He said he would also be forced to cancel his appearance at a literary festival in New York City and several talks he had agreed to give at U.S. schools such as Harvard, Princeton, and New York University. Finally, he would be prevented from taking up his post as a visiting lecturer at the Berlin University of the Arts—a three-year commitment offered by the school in April 2011 (see CMB No. [30](#)). Ai was detained without charge in April 2011 and held for 81 days amid a broader crackdown on dissent in the country, then subjected to a year of probation that ended on June 21. He said the police in Beijing had agreed to return his passport, “but have no clear time schedule.” After his 2011 release, the authorities declared that Ai owed a total of \$2.4 million in back taxes and penalties. He sued the Beijing tax bureau in April to contest the claim, but his second and final appeal was rejected by Beijing’s Chaoyang district court on September 27. He had already submitted about half of the money as a deposit in order to pursue his case, notably aided by tens of thousands of small donations from supporters (see CMB No. [40](#)). Nevertheless, he said after the new ruling that he did not plan to hand over any more money, even if it meant being jailed. “We’re not going to pay the fine because we don’t recognize the charge,” he said. Unlike in all of the previous court proceedings, Ai was allowed to hear the September 27 verdict in person, but his lawyers were unable to attend due to the short notice given by the authorities, which apparently violated Chinese legal procedures (see CMB No. [66](#)).

- *New York Times* 9/25/2012: [Chinese artist says authorities still have his passport](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 9/27/2012: [Ai Weiwei: I won’t pay](#)
- *Daily Beast* 9/27/2012: [China rejects Ai Weiwei’s \\$2.4 million tax appeal](#)

TIBET



Tibetan singer-actor detained

Radio Free Asia reported that police in Malho Prefecture, Qinghai Province, had detained a Tibetan

singer and actor named Sogtruk Sherab on September 20, after he was accused of performing songs and skits that hinted at the hardships of Tibetan people under Chinese rule. One of the pieces was reportedly a celebratory skit on the election of Lobsang Sangay, the prime minister of Tibet's India-based government in exile. Scores of Tibetan artists, writers, and musicians who criticize Chinese repression or promote Tibetan culture and language have been jailed by the Chinese government, which views their work as threats to the legitimacy of its rule (see, inter alia, CMB Nos. [61](#), [65](#)).

- *Tibetan Review* 9/23/2012: [Tibetan singer detained for berating Chinese rule](#)
- Radio Free Asia 9/21/2012: [Tibetan performer detained](#)

BEYOND CHINA



Confucius Institutes continue to expand worldwide

On September 18, the Chinese Communist Party–run newspaper *Guangming Daily* reported that there are 380 Confucius Institutes (CIs) in 108 countries around the world. The institutes are Chinese government–sponsored facilities that offer Chinese language training and other educational programs. They have been criticized in some countries for serving as vehicles for Chinese government propaganda and censorship, and praised for the same reason by Communist Party propaganda chief Li Changchun (see CMB No. [62](#)). According to the article, the total tally includes 11 CIs in the Middle East and 31 CIs and five locations that offer CI classes in Africa. The statistics were disclosed by CI chief executive Xu Ling during her meeting with local university officials in Israel on September 13. In addition to signing an agreement on continued CI programs at Tel Aviv University, which would be funded by \$150,000 each year from China, Xu discussed plans to open a CI branch at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The CI at Tel Aviv University was launched in 2007. It became a source of controversy in March 2008, when the school took down a student exhibition that focused on the persecuted Falun Gong spiritual movement, under pressure from the Chinese embassy. The decision was condemned by the student body and by an Israeli court in October 2009. Separately, China's state-run Xinhua news agency reported that a CI was opened at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji's capital city, Suva, on September 6. The facility was described as the first of its kind in the Pacific Islands region.

- China Scope 9/19/2012: [Guangming Daily: China has established 42 Confucius Institutes in the Middle East and Africa](#)
- Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the State of Israel 9/18/2012 (in Chinese): [Ambassador to Israel Gao Yanping attends signing event organized by Confucius Institute headquarters](#)
- *Jerusalem Post* 10/1/2009: [Court backs students in TAU row over Falun Gong exhibit the university removed](#)
- Xinhua 9/6/2012: [Confucius Institute opens in Fiji-based university](#)

NOTABLE ANALYSIS



Freedom House report finds growing web restrictions in China and beyond

On September 24, Freedom House released its *Freedom on the Net 2012* report, which examines internet and digital media freedom in 47 countries around the globe, including an in-depth chapter on China. Home to both the world's largest population of internet users and the most advanced control apparatus, China was rated Not Free in the report, declining slightly from the 2011 assessment. Due to improvements in Burma over the past year and a half, China was ranked last among the 11 Asian countries examined. Although no dramatic changes were made to the internet censorship system, the authorities took several steps to close existing loopholes, including centralizing ownership of cybercafes, imposing real-name registration on microblogging platforms, and using extralegal abductions in addition to long prison sentences to deter online activists. Globally, the report's findings indicate that restrictions on internet freedom in many countries have continued to grow, while the methods used are becoming more sophisticated and less visible. In particular, certain nuanced tactics that were previously evident in only a small set of countries like China—such as localized network disruptions or paid progovernment commentators like the “50 Cent Party”—have appeared in many more states. China is increasingly serving as an incubator for sophisticated restrictions, with governments in other authoritarian countries like Belarus, Uzbekistan, and Iran modeling their own internet controls on those pioneered by Beijing. Nevertheless, the report also found that in China and elsewhere, activists and bloggers have scored some “internet freedom victories” as they push back creatively against the growing restrictions.

- [*Freedom on the Net 2012: Overview Essay*](#)
- [*Freedom on the Net 2012: China Chapter*](#)
- [*Freedom on the Net 2012: Full Report*](#)

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

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