



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

Issue No. 77: December 13, 2012
Headlines

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-  China ranks third in world on jailing of journalists
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PHOTO OF THE WEEK: SMILE, YOU ARE ON WEIBO!



Credit: [*Nanfang Daily*](#)

BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS



New propaganda chief reemerges, seeks better techniques

Liu Qibao, whose appointment as head of the Communist Party's Central Propaganda Department was announced on November 21, returned to public view in a December 6 article by state-run Xinhua news agency. His absence since November 27, which included a canceled foreign trip, had spurred rumors of a family illness or a corruption investigation linked to his former subordinates (see CMB No. [76](#)). Liu's temporary and unexplained disappearance also drew comparisons to a similar episode in September involving incoming party leader Xi Jinping (see CMB No. [67](#)). The December 6 Xinhua article and a subsequent piece published on December 11 focused on recent visits Liu paid to key state-run news outlets and government agencies handling propaganda work. He emphasized during the visits that in the "spirit of the 18th Party Congress" and recent pronouncements by Xi (CMB No. [76](#)), the state media should seek to improve their writing style in order to more effectively give "correct guidance" and "consolidate public opinion"—an apparent reference to closing the gap between sometimes stilted party propaganda and increasingly savvy and skeptical Chinese audiences. In his comments to government agencies, Liu said that the party must conduct further research on how to strengthen "internet management" and "foreign publicity," pointing to potential new manipulation of online communications and more sophisticated tactics for propaganda aimed at foreign audiences. David Bandurski of Hong Kong University's China Media Project suggested that in light of Liu's comments, it seemed unlikely that Xi's calls for fresh language in party communications would bring substantive changes to censorship and propaganda policies. "Less jargon does not necessarily spell more openness," he wrote.

- *South China Morning Post* 12/7/2012: [Report on propaganda chief Liu Qibao released](#)
- China Media Project 12/10/2012: [Liu Qibao is back, hard as ever](#)
- Xinhua 12/11/2012 (in Chinese): [Central news outlets must reform to exhibit new culture](#)
- Xinhua 12/6/2012 (in Chinese): [Liu Qibao: Propaganda cultural work must be done thoroughly](#)



China ranks third in world on jailing of journalists

On December 11, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) released its annual tally of imprisoned journalists, ranking China as the world's third-worst jailer of reporters, after Turkey and Iran. According to the report, at least 32 journalists were imprisoned in China as of December 1, and 19 of them were Tibetans or Uighurs who had documented the country's ethnic tensions. The actual total of individuals held in China for expressing their opinions or disseminating sensitive information is certainly higher, though the precise number is difficult to determine given the authorities' efforts to restrict investigation of such cases. Because the regime tightly controls the print and broadcast media, most of those punished for speaking out are not journalists but grassroots activists, internet users, or religious believers. Moreover, many media professionals who earn the ire of the authorities are dealt with in deliberately opaque, extralegal ways that fall short of formal incarceration. For example, the Paris-based media rights group Reporters Without Borders (RSF) reported on December 6 that Li Yuanlong, a freelance journalist who was detained in

November for an online article about the death of five boys in Bijie, Guizhou Province (see CMB No. [75](#)), had returned home with his wife after what RSF called a three-day “forced vacation.” The couple had been compelled by authorities to fly hundreds of miles from their home to Hainan Island after the boys’ story was picked up by local and international media. Despite their release, officials continued to prevent Li and his wife from granting media interviews. The Chinese authorities are often sensitive to international assessments of the country’s press freedom. On December 10, censors at the popular microblogging platform Sina Weibo deleted an image of a news article that mentioned China’s 187th-place ranking in Freedom House’s *Freedom of the Press 2012* global index. The user who posted the image had 62,000 followers. “Number 187, that’s still not bad. At least we’re still ahead of those ‘golden nations’ that neighbor us,” the account owner wrote sardonically, referring to North Korea and Burma.

- CPJ 12/11/2012: [Number of jailed journalists sets global record](#)
- Reporters Without Borders 12/5/2012: [Photojournalist ‘sent on holiday’ after covering death of five children](#)
- China Media Project 12/10/2012: [Post on China press freedom ranking deleted](#)



Surveillance, psychiatric detention limit academic freedom

Although academic freedom in China has expanded in recent decades, a range of controls remain in place to curtail discussions of politically sensitive issues and encourage self-censorship among scholars and students. In early 2012, Vice President Xi Jinping—now the leader of the Communist Party—urged university heads to adopt “firmer and stronger measures to maintain harmony,” including monitoring young lecturers. Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) reported on December 11 that Wang Peijian, an outspoken law professor and veteran democracy advocate at Jiliang University in Zhejiang Province, had been forcibly sent to a psychiatric facility for expressing “politically sensitive” opinions at school. His class was suspended on December 8, after he reportedly discussed with students his views on topics such as the Communist Party’s monopoly on power, the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre, and the suppression of human rights lawyers. Wang speculated that his comments in class were likely reported to the school authorities by one of his students. On December 9, the *Los Angeles Times* explored the role of the Chinese Communist Youth League Committee, known as *tuanwei*, in monitoring activities outside the classroom as well. Student groups, including at prestigious institutions like Peking University, are supposed to obtain approval to register from the *tuanwei*. Those that do not often face restrictions and intimidation. Bo Ran, an editor of an unregistered online student magazine, told the paper that he had been interrogated by unidentified men at school after writing an article on how to behave if “invited to tea” by security agents. Hu Yunzhi, a *tuanwei* member at Peking University, said he was responsible for reporting on his fellow classmates’ political opinions, which he collected from locations including campus lawns and dormitory rooms. “If something sensitive happens, we have to give feedback to leaders immediately, even if we have a big exam,” he admitted.

- Radio Free Asia 12/11/2012: [Lecturer sent to mental hospital](#)
- *Los Angeles Times* 12/9/2012: [China keeps a close eye on university student groups](#)
- *Telegraph* 1/5/2012: [China’s vice president orders more thought control over students](#)

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Amid Xi's symbolic trip, party leaders' names uncensored

On December 10, newly appointed Communist Party chief Xi Jinping visited the city of Shenzhen in southern Guangdong Province. Netizens and other observers commented on the symbolism of his apparent decision to retrace former leader Deng Xiaoping's famous 1992 Southern Tour, which had signaled the regime's renewed commitment to economic opening. Xi's remarks during the trip made vague references to the need to "deepen reforms" regarding the economy and "strengthen rule of law." In another notable gesture, Shenzhen authorities did not stop traffic for the passage of Xi's motorcade, and a netizen snapped a photograph of Xi smiling and waving that quickly circulated online. Xi had recently overseen new party guidelines that encouraged senior officials to avoid alienating the public with pompous behavior (see CMB No. [76](#)). The visit to Shenzhen coincided with the easing of keyword censorship for some officials' names on the Sina Weibo microblogging service. The names of Xi and other members of the new Politburo Standing Committee were unblocked and returned search results, including some critical comments, according to foreign journalists, netizens, and tests by *China Media Bulletin* editors. The long-blocked names of previous Standing Committee members like Hu Jintao and Zhou Yongkang, and of disgraced official Bo Xilai, were unblocked as well. However, the names of outgoing prime minister Wen Jiabao, the focus of a *New York Times* feature that unveiled the prodigious wealth of his family members, and of new propaganda chief Liu Qibao (see above) remained blocked. The reduced censorship likely represents a temporary loosening after the extremely tight controls imposed surrounding the 18th Party Congress in November, rather than a fundamental shift in the leadership's approach to censorship. Over the past year, the names of Bo and Zhou, for example, have been blocked and unblocked numerous times. In a possible effort to ensure that any more open discussion is limited to the internet, the Central Propaganda Department reportedly issued a December 6 media directive stating: "In reports concerning the Party and national leaders, strictly and without exception publish and broadcast in accordance with Xinhua wire copy. Do not quote from foreign media or online sources."

- Reuters 12/10/2012: [China party chief stresses reform, censors relax grasp on internet](#)
- Offbeat China 12/9/2012: [A netizen's snap of Xi Jinping during his 'southern tour' went viral on Weibo](#)
- *Telegraph* 12/11/2012: [Sina Weibo: First cracks appear in great firewall of China](#)
- *China Digital Times* 12/11/2012: [Ministry of Truth: Reporting official corruption](#)

TIBET & XINJIANG



State media accuse two Tibetans of colluding in self-immolations

As self-immolations continue to take place in Tibetan regions, having occurred nearly once a day in November, the official Xinhua news agency reported on December 9 that a Tibetan monk named Lorang Konchok and his nephew, Lorang Tsering, had been detained in Sichuan Province's Ngaba

(Aba) Prefecture since August for their alleged roles in encouraging eight self-immolations in the region and passing information to Tibetan exile groups. The two men reportedly provided overseas Tibetans with photographs and accounts that identified individuals who set themselves on fire to protest Chinese rule. The Xinhua report attempted to link their actions with supposed instigation by the Tibetan government in exile and the Dalai Lama (see CMB No. 76), echoing a common theme in Communist Party propaganda that attributes indigenous ethnic protests to “foreign hostile forces.” Separately, *Gannan Daily*, a Gansu-based party newspaper, reported on December 3 that China’s supreme court, the prosecution agency, and the Ministry of Public Security had recently issued guidelines determining that “the act of self-immolation by Tibetans is a crime.” However, the guidelines were not available on the relevant agencies’ websites, and staff at the Supreme People’s Court denied having issued such rules when approached by the New York–based *International Business Times*. The editorial desk of *Gannan Daily* asserted that the article had been provided by the provincial propaganda department.

- *New York Times* 12/10/2012: [China detains two Tibetans in self-immolation protests](#)
- Xinhua 12/9/2012: [Two suspects detained for inciting self-immolations in SW China](#)
- *International Business Times* 12/10/2012 (in Chinese): [People’s Daily Online said Chinese authorities would criminalize self-immolators, Supreme People’s Court said unaware and report needs to be verified](#)

BEYOND CHINA



Taiwan regulators urged to ‘stand firm’ on Next Media sale

Madeline Earp of the New York–based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) published a blog post on December 10 that raised concerns over the recent purchase of the Next Media Group in Taiwan, which she warned “would put independent news outlets critical of China into the hands of a pro-Beijing media tycoon” (see CMB No. 75). Although the deal was still awaiting government approval, Hong Kong media mogul Jimmy Lai, a vocal critic of the Chinese authorities, had sold Next Media’s Taiwan assets on November 27 to a consortium of Taiwanese businessmen that included Tsai Shao-tsung, the son of Tsai Eng-meng. The elder Tsai’s sprawling conglomerate already includes print newspapers, television stations, and a cable television provider. Earp urged Taiwan’s regulatory bodies, the Fair Trade Commission and the National Communications Commission, to reject the sale, saying such a decision would demonstrate their independence and “prove that Taiwan has the safeguards to withstand influence from China” over its freewheeling media environment. As Taiwanese grassroots groups consisting of students, scholars, and activists held public rallies to oppose Tsai’s growing media dominance, a directive sent by the Ministry of Education on November 29 to institutions of higher education was leaked online. The document urged a total of 37 colleges to “show concern” for students who participated in the protests, and included a list of schools whose students were known to have been involved in a local advocacy group. Taiwanese netizens reacted angrily, criticizing the ministry for generating a chilling effect on campus. On December 4, the ministry posted an apology on its website and guaranteed that students would not face retribution for participating in public affairs.

- CPJ 12/10/2012: [Taiwanese media sale could threaten press freedom](#)
 - Central News Agency 12/2/2012: [Ministry asked to apologize over interference in student movement](#)
 - Ministry of Education 12/4/2012 (in Chinese): [Ministry of Education acknowledges student participation in public affairs, reinforces that schools should respect student basic rights](#)
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China backs plan to limit internet freedom at global conference

During the World Conference on International Telecommunications (WCIT) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, China joined other countries with repressive policies on internet freedom in an effort to extend governmental control over online information. The WCIT, which began December 3 and was scheduled to end on December 14, was a closed-door meeting of some 150 governments convened by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a United Nations agency, with the aim of updating international regulations on communications. Authoritarian member states such as China, Russia, and Sudan supported a proposal introduced by the UAE on December 7 that would greatly increase national governments' control over the internet and potentially encourage blocking and filtering systems. It would also extend ITU jurisdiction to internet matters. The global internet is primarily administered by nongovernmental entities under the current arrangement, and the ITU is an intergovernmental body. The proposal, which was first made known on WCITLeaks, a website that posted reportedly confidential documents from the conference, was withdrawn on December 10. However, an amended version was resubmitted the next day. The United States and allied countries opposed the measure, as did multinational technology companies such as Google and Microsoft. Many private-sector and nongovernmental groups also criticized the opaque nature of the WCIT, which largely excluded civil society. As the conference drew to a close, 89 countries, including China, signed the final text of the proposed treaty, which included a nonbinding resolution stating that “all governments should have an equal role and responsibility for internet governance.” But 55 countries—led by major players like the United States and the United Kingdom—outright refused to sign it or otherwise demurred, meaning the document would have little direct impact on internet freedom in the near term.

- Bloomberg 12/12/12: [China, Russia resubmit proposal to get web control](#)
 - *Atlantic* 12/3/2012: [The Russian and Chinese governments' threat to the internet as we know it](#)
 - IDJ News Service 12/11/2012: [Russia, China withdraw controversial proposal at treaty conference](#)
 - Reporters Without Borders 12/10/2012: [Internet's future at stake at ITU-run Dubai conference](#)
 - BBC 12/14/2012: [US and UK refuse to sign UN's communications treaty](#)
 - *Atlantic* 12/14/2012: [How the UN's 'game-changing' internet treaty failed](#)
 - Agence France-Presse 12/14/2012: [89 nations sign controversial UN telecom treaty](#)
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Huawei–Iran ties reported, ZTE wins state funding for expansion

A special report released by Reuters on December 5 offered new evidence that Huawei, China’s leading telecommunications firm, had provided the Iranian authorities with technology infrastructure to monitor the telephone calls and internet activities of dissidents. A company that partnered with Huawei reportedly offered to sell a Huawei-developed interception tool to Iran’s first nationwide wireless broadband provider, MobinNet, before its launch in 2010. The proposal documents boasted of features that would support “special requirements from security agencies to monitor in real time the communication traffic between subscribers.” Huawei also gave MobinNet a presentation on a system with “deep packet inspection” (DPI), an intrusive function that can be used to block websites, track internet users, and reconstruct e-mail messages. Huawei denied having sold either product to the Iranian company, despite a Reuters source’s claims that MobinNet obtained a Huawei DPI system. An official with MobinNet declined to respond to the Reuters journalists’ questions, saying simply, “So you know the answers. Why do you need confirmation?” The article added to Reuters’ previous reporting on the middleman role of ZTE, another Chinese telecommunications company, in selling equipment to Iran in violation of sanctions imposed by the United States and European countries (see CMB No. [71](#)). On December 4, ZTE announced that state-run China Development Bank had approved a \$20 billion credit line to facilitate the company’s overseas projects, raising further questions about its ties to the Chinese authorities. U.S. lawmakers have suggested that both Huawei and ZTE could assist the Chinese government in intelligence gathering and other activities.

- Reuters 12/5/2012: [Special Report: How foreign firms tried to sell spy gear to Iran](#)
- *Tech in Asia* 12/7/2012: [How Huawei helped Iran spy on citizens and why brand China is poison](#)
- *Forbes* 12/7/2012: [Chinese policy bank helps ZTE, Huawei to fly the flag](#)
- *Tech in Asia* 12/5/2012: [ZTE closes \\$20 billion financing deal, but raises further questions about government ties](#)
- ZTE Corporation 12/4/2012: [Announcement on the ‘development financing strategic cooperation agreement’ with China Development Bank](#)

NOTABLE ANALYSIS



Finnish study analyzes keyword censorship during mass incidents

The Finnish Institute of International Affairs published a study in October called *Battle Lines in the Chinese Blogosphere*, examining censorship on the Sina Weibo microblogging platform in the context of the Chinese government’s responses to local protests. The report specifically explores keyword blocking and unblocking surrounding two incidents of unrest in Guangdong Province in December 2011: the highly publicized village revolt in Wukan, and a less widely reported series of protests in the village of Haimen. In an effort to deduce how much keyword blocking is the result of specific party directives as opposed to the initiative of private corporations like Sina, the study’s author,

Keegan Elmer, compares the timing of keyword controls with reports in traditional media that are subject to well-documented censorship and propaganda guidance (the study includes several timelines illustrating these comparisons). Elmer finds that blocking of the village names occurred as the protests were gaining momentum and prominence, accompanied in the Wukan case by a several-day-long media blackout. The unblocking occurred once provincial authorities had decided on their response, closely followed by traditional media reports announcing the government's stance, even if tensions had not yet fully died down. Given the ongoing sensitivity of the situation at those moments, Elmer concludes that the unblocking likely occurred as a result of government directives. He suggests that changes in keyword controls could even serve as the earliest sign of a change in government attitudes toward a given incident or issue, since they are implemented before official pronouncements in state media. However, Elmer also speculates that the initial blocking of keywords related to an emerging incident may often be imposed independently by Sina based on its internalized understanding of government priorities.

- **Finnish Institute of International Affairs 10/25/2012: [Battle lines in the Chinese blogosphere: Keyword control as a tactic in managing mass incidents](#)**

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

[Freedom on the Net 2012](#)
[Freedom of the World 2012](#)
[Freedom of the Press 2011](#)

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