



# 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

-  'Southern Weekly' gets new editor, honors censored stories
-  New rules expand real-name registration, tighten censorship
-  Beijing said to have over two million online 'propaganda workers'
-  Tibetan filmmaker's prison conditions reportedly improved
-  China's Tencent accused of censoring app users abroad

## PHOTO OF THE WEEK: SILENT PROTEST



Credit: [China Media Project](#)

## BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS



### **‘Southern Weekly’ gets new editor, honors censored stories**

According to a January 18 article by Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post*, a new editor in chief was appointed at Guangzhou-based *Southern Weekly* as part of an effort to resolve disputes between staff and Guangdong Province propaganda officials. The weekly’s journalists had gone on strike for several days in early January following the censorship of its New Year’s editorial, triggering broader societal calls for free speech (see CMB [special feature](#)). Wang Genghui, a deputy editor in chief at Nanfang Media Group, which owns *Southern Weekly*, will reportedly replace Huang Can at the helm of the paper. Wang is reputedly more receptive to the opinions of subordinate editors and journalists. Meanwhile, an in-house censor at *Southern Weekly* named Zeng Li reported online that the Guangdong authorities had agreed to allow a larger proportion of editorial decisions, including on assignment ideas and drafts, to take effect without official approval before publication. Speaking as an insider, Zeng said censorship at the paper had gotten worse amid the Communist Party leadership transfer in 2012 and the appointment of a new provincial propaganda chief in May of that year. At its annual meeting on January 18, *Southern Weekly* presented awards for the five “best censored stories” from 2012, including the New Year’s editorial that was heavily altered by censors. The other honored articles, which covered topics ranging from anti-Japanese protests to deadly flooding in Beijing, indicated the scope of censorship at the outlet. A microblog post that showed summaries of the censored stories was shared more than a thousand times by netizens until it was deleted after three hours. Separately, *Southern Weekly*’s sister magazine *Nanfang People* ran an 18-page report on prominent human rights lawyer Pu Zhiqiang, detailing his contributions to reforming China’s legal system. Any previous mentions of Pu in mainland Chinese media had been assiduously censored.

- *South China Morning Post* 1/18/2013: [New editor appointed at paper to calm dispute over censorship](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 1/22/2013: [Southern Weekly agrees to autonomy deal, says censor](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 1/19/2013: [Southern Weekly gives awards to stories scrapped by censors](#)



### **State media join public alarm at record smog levels**

In the face of increased public pressure online and unprecedented levels of air pollution in Beijing and other cities, China’s state media in mid-January appeared to open up to a critical examination of the smog problem. The official Xinhua news agency reported on January 12 that the presence of a particularly harmful type of air pollutant, PM 2.5, had reached a record high in the capital. On January 13, the *Beijing News* published a report with a diagram that detailed PM 2.5 concentrations in various part of the city. In a January 14 editorial, the Communist Party–owned newspaper *Global Times* encouraged the government to “publish the facts” instead of “guiding public opinion,” though

it also urged the public not to blame the government for pollution and to understand the need for continued industrial development. The authorities had long been under pressure to acknowledge the worsening pollution and provide more accurate air-quality information, particularly because U.S. diplomatic posts and some Chinese citizens have been disseminating their own readings and assessments online. “Given the public’s ability to spread this information, especially on social media, the government itself has to make adjustments,” said prominent Chinese environmentalist Ma Jun. On January 22, Beijing mayor Wang Anshun announced that as part of an official effort to reduce smog, the government in 2013 would limit car sales and take older vehicles off the road. But many internet users were skeptical about the government’s pledges, with one netizen commenting, “These ‘old cars’ are what the ordinary people drive. You people can only dare talk about this subject when you start phasing out all the cars officials drive.” State media had already begun to carry some critical coverage of the air-quality problem in recent years, but the government has also rebuked the U.S. embassy for releasing independent monitoring data online, raising doubts about its commitment to transparency on the issue (see CMB No. [60](#)).

- *Washington Post* 1/16/2013: [Chinese media open up about Beijing smog](#)
- *Guardian* 1/14/2013: [Beijing smog continues as Chinese state media urge more action](#)
- *Tea Leaf Nation* 1/15/2013: [Why has Chinese media coverage of Beijing’s smog been so unflinching?](#)
- *Global Times* 1/14/2013: [Society needs fair call to clear heavy smog](#)
- *Reuters* 1/22/2013: [Beijing’s air pollution steps get poor reception among some in China’s capital](#)



## **Prominent blogger silenced, attacked on book tour**

Li Chengpeng, a former investigative journalist with a microblog following of some 6.6 million people, was threatened by authorities and physically attacked during his book tour in mid-January. Li, who had spoken out during a recent high-profile standoff over censorship at the Guangzhou-based newspaper *Southern Weekly* (see above), traveled to a number of Chinese cities to promote his new book, *Everybody in the World Knows*. He reported on his microblogging account on January 11 that he had been warned not to speak at a book signing in Chengdu the following day. At the event, he complied with the warning, but protested by wearing a black mask over his mouth and briefly opening his jacket to reveal a white T-shirt with the handwritten words “I love you all.” He explained in a later interview that the bookstore employees told him they would lose their jobs if he ignored the authorities’ request, a collective-punishment tactic often used by the Communist Party to pressure critics. However, Li chose not to cancel the event because readers had come from as far as Chongqing, Xi’an, and Shanghai. During his stop in Beijing on January 13, two men attacked him. The first—who identified himself as a Maoist—tossed a wrapped-up kitchen knife at him, but missed his target. The other man, who reportedly said Li’s book was an attack on China, punched the author. Both were held for questioning, though the first was quickly released. Li’s book signing on January 15 in Shenzhen drew 3,000 fans. But an event in Guangzhou two days later was canceled at the last minute, when the venue claimed that a fire safety inspection was taking place on the same day. As Li apologized online for the cancelation, a netizen nicknamed Wchengbo alluded to the

Communist Party leadership transfer in November 2012, writing, “The dynasty has changed, but the way of thought is unchangeable.”

- NTDTV 1/14/2013: [Li Chengpeng attacked during Beijing book signing](#)
- *China Digital Times* 1/16/2013: [Li Chengpeng’s silent book signing](#)
- *Time* 1/16/2013: [As Chinese debate the need for political reform, an outspoken blogger is attacked](#)
- China Media Project 1/23/2013: [Li Chengpeng: Why I signed in silence](#)

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## NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



### **New rules expand real-name registration, tighten censorship**

On December 28, the National People’s Congress (NPC) Standing Committee adopted the “Decision to Strengthen the Protection of Online Information.” Although it includes some provisions aimed at curbing the theft of users’ personal information, other elements increase restrictions on users’ rights to privacy and freedom of expression. Specifically, one section of the decision requires service providers—evidently ranging from home and mobile internet providers to social-media websites—to implement real-name registration of their users. Users will still be able to use pseudonyms for posting, but their true identity will be known to the providers, and through them to the security services. Most mobile web and home internet providers already register subscribers under their real names, and major microblogging platforms were required in early 2012 to do the same, though implementation was incomplete and the relevant regulations did not have the force of law. The new decision by the NPC Standing Committee, which acts as a de facto legislative body when the full NPC is not in session, strengthens the requirement and extends it beyond microblogging platforms. Another of the measure’s 12 provisions requires providers to “strengthen the management of information,” a reference to the censorship of user posts that such companies already engage in. Under the decision, providers must cease dissemination of the targeted content while preserving relevant records—presumably meaning the identity of the user—and informing “relevant controlling departments” of the incident. State-run media touted the new measure as necessary to protect users’ personal information and prevent the circulation of spam and harmful content, repeatedly citing the “rule of law” as the basis for the policy and its enforcement. In practice, decisions on what internet firms should delete are made arbitrarily by Communist Party propaganda officials, or by company staff attempting to anticipate or interpret the authorities’ instructions. The process is opaque and devoid of any review by an independent court. Online activists and human rights groups expressed concerns that the new rules would encourage self-censorship and facilitate the punishment of users who expose abuses of power. It remains to be seen how strictly the decision will be enforced, but providers appear to be leaning toward disabling activist users’ accounts. On January 3, the *Washington Post* reported that several prominent bloggers, journalists, a cartoonist, and a professor had their microblog accounts closed within days of the decision’s adoption.

- Xinhua 1/6/2013: [China’s new internet ID policy triggers online discussion](#)

- Bloomberg 12/28/2012: [China passes law requiring people identify selves online](#)
- Xinhua 12/28/2012 (in Chinese): [Decision to strengthen the protection of online information](#)
- Human Rights Watch 1/4/2013: [China: Renewed restrictions send online chill](#)
- Xinhua 12/28/2012: [China's legislature adopts online info rules to protect privacy](#)
- Xinhua 12/28/2012 (in Chinese): [Release: Regarding National People's Congress \(NPC\) Standing Committee's "Decision to Strengthen the Protection of Online Information"](#)
- *China Copyright and Media* 12/28/2012: [National People's Congress Standing Committee Decision concerning Strengthening Network Information Protection](#)
- *Washington Post* 1/3/2013: [China's 'weibo' accounts shuttered as part of internet crackdown](#)
- *Huffington Post* 12/28/2012: [China real-name registration is now law in country](#)



## Beijing said to have over two million online 'propaganda workers'

According to a January 18 *Beijing News* article on a meeting held the previous day, Beijing propaganda chief Lu Wei told the gathering that the city's "2.06 million" propaganda workers "should make more efforts in opinion guiding on hot topics." The number was apparently the sum of 60,000 directly employed government workers and some two million informal paid commentators. The *South China Morning Post* cited another official from the Beijing Internet Information Office who confirmed the two million figure. Lu reportedly directed those present to "browse Weibo, set up Weibo accounts, send messages, [and] study Weibo," referring to the popular microblogging service Sina Weibo. The comments reflect the Communist Party's increasing investment in manipulating public debate online as a complement to its robust censorship system. Since 2005, observers of China's blogosphere have noted the presence of users who are paid to support the authorities in online discussions, often referred to as the "Fifty Cent Party" for the small fees they allegedly collect for each posted comment. In 2011, *China Media Bulletin* editors documented online reports of over a dozen training sessions for paid internet commentators from across the country, a reflection of the institutionalization of the tactic. Interestingly, in listing "hot topics," Lu did not name official corruption, although a series of online exposés have prompted the firing of several officials in recent months (see below). Instead, he cited topics including "economic trends, price controls, transformation and development, employment, housing, social security, and income distribution." This could indicate that as the new leadership under Communist Party general secretary Xi Jinping prepares to embark on economic reforms, it is seeking to deflect public criticism and control any debate about new policies. Netizens reacted to the news with anger and disbelief. Many noted that the total figure for propaganda workers was equivalent to one tenth of Beijing's population, though it was not clear that all lived in the city. One microblogger remarked, "No wonder we have to pay such high taxes!"

- *Beijing News* 2/18/2013 (in Chinese): [Hundreds of artifacts to be restored this year](#)
- *Telegraph* 1/18/2013: [Chinese spin doctors urged to spread 'positive energy' online](#)

- *South China Morning Post* 1/19/2013: [About 10pc of Beijing residents work for propaganda services](#)
  - *China Digital Times* 1/18/2013: [One in ten Beijingers is a 'propaganda worker'](#)
  - *Financial Times* 1/21/2013: [The weibo generation can reboot China](#)
  - *Freedom at Issue* 10/11/2011: [China's growing army of paid internet commentators](#)
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## **Party ideologue fired over sex and bribery allegations online**

The official Xinhua news agency announced on January 17 that Communist Party ideological official Yi Junqing had been removed from his post, after a female colleague revealed her extramarital relationship with him in a 120,000-word online diary in December 2012. Yi was the director of the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau, a research institute responsible for providing Marxist theoretical support for party policies, among other functions. He was said to have offered the woman, Chang Yan, a fellowship position in exchange for \$1,600, and the two eventually had 17 sexual encounters at various hotels, according to Chang's account. Without providing details, Xinhua's brief statement on January 17 said that Yi had been dismissed for "living an improper lifestyle." The allegations of immorality were especially damaging because Yi had served as a public advocate of Chinese and Marxist ethics and virtue. Hangzhou's *Qianjiang Evening News* wrote in a commentary on January 18, "He looks knowledgeable and sounds Marxist-Leninist, but once dissected, all people can see is thieving and whoring." The *Zhejiang Daily* published an online editorial on the same day, entitled "Mouth Full of Marxism, Belly Full of Deceit," though it was removed after two days. In recent months, an increasing number of Chinese officials have been exposed and pilloried online for various types of malfeasance (see, inter alia, CMB Nos. [72](#), [75](#)). While Yi's story was widely circulated among Chinese netizens, prominent investigative journalist Zhu Ruifeng said, "People have come to treat such news as entertainment, but that's only because we feel so helpless."

- *Associated Press* 1/18/2013: [Head of Communist Party think-tank removed in latest sex scandal for Chinese establishment](#)
  - *New York Times* 1/19/2013: [Web tell-all on an affair brings down a Chinese official](#)
  - *Telegraph* 1/17/2013: [Scorned woman ends lover's career after posting diary of their affair online](#)
  - *Ministry of Tofu* 1/18/2013: [Viral love diary of mistress ends career of Yi Junqing, senior propaganda official](#)
  - *Fei Chang Dao* 1/21/2013: [Zhejiang Daily deletes editorial on fallen party translation bureau head Yi Junqing](#)
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# TIBET & XINJIANG



## **Tibetan filmmaker's prison conditions reportedly improved**

The Switzerland-based group Filming for Tibet reported on January 21 that self-taught Tibetan filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen had been transferred from the Xichuan labor camp in Siling (Xining), Qinghai Province, to the Qinghai Provincial Women's Prison, where the conditions of his detention were improved. Wangchen is currently serving a six-year prison term for "subversion"; the authorities detained him in March 2008 for his documentary *Leaving Fear Behind*, which featured a series of interviews that revealed the Chinese government's harsh oppression of Tibetan people. A number of Tibetans who appeared in the film or assisted with its production have disappeared and are thought to be in police custody (see CMB No. [76](#)). During a January 15 visit to the Xichuan labor camp by family members, Wangchen said he had suffered from harsh treatment that included six months of solitary confinement. His improved detention conditions may reflect the authorities' response to international pressure. Numerous human rights groups, including Amnesty International, have demanded the immediate release of the filmmaker. Wangchen was honored with the 2012 International Press Freedom Award by the Committee to Protect Journalists in November.

- **Committee to Protect Journalists 1/22/2013: [Jailed Tibetan filmmaker shifted to better conditions](#)**
- **Filming for Tibet 1/21/2013: [Dhondup Wangchen transferred to another Chinese prison](#)**
- **Phayul 1/22/2013: [China transfers Tibetan filmmaker Dhondup Wangchen to a women's prison](#)**



## **Jailed Uighur writer rumored dead amid conflicting reports**

The well-being of prominent Uighur writer Nurmuhemmet Yasin, who has been in custody since his 2004 arrest in Kashgar, Xinjiang, was recently put in the spotlight following unconfirmed reports of his death. According to prominent Beijing-based human rights lawyer Teng Biao, the writer's friends said that he had died from poor health in 2011. However, a relative of Yasin's told Radio Free Asia on January 2 that she visited him in prison in July 2012 and received a letter from him in October suggesting that he was alive and in good health. Yasin is currently serving a 10-year sentence for "inciting separatism," having published a piece entitled "Wild Pigeon" in a Kashgar-based literary journal that the authorities interpreted as a veiled criticism of Chinese rule. He is an honorary member of the international literary rights group PEN, and his poetry and writing has appeared in Uighur-language textbooks. The uncertainty surrounding the status of such a high-profile prisoner underscores the extreme difficulty of obtaining information about the many lesser-known prisoners of conscience in China.

- **IFEX 1/10/2013: [China urged to provide information on welfare of detained Uighur writer](#)**
- **Radio Free Asia 1/2/2013: [Writer's death reports doubted](#)**

- English PEN 1/3/2013: [Celebrated Uighur writer rumoured to have died in prison](#)
  - Amnesty International 1/2/2013: [China: Uighur writer's death in prison would be bitter blow](#)
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## BEYOND CHINA



### **China's Tencent accused of censoring app users abroad**

Chinese internet giant Tencent has come under scrutiny this month amid reports that its popular messaging program WeChat was applying China's censorship rules to overseas users. WeChat allows users to send free, instant voicemails or text messages via mobile phones and tablet computers using a variety of operating systems. The service has about 300 million users overall, of whom an estimated 15 million live outside China. By early January, an increasing number of international WeChat users were reporting that they had trouble sending out messages containing terms that are banned on China's internet, such as "Falun Gong." A test by the news blog *Tech in Asia* found that WeChat also blocked terms related to the recent *Southern Weekly* incident in Guangzhou (see above). While some censored messages were intended for recipients in China, there were also reports of messages being blocked when both sender and recipient were in other countries, such as Thailand and Singapore. In a statement issued on January 14, Tencent apologized for the "technical glitch." However, it did not explain the cause of the blocking, or whether Chinese authorities played a role. Separately, on January 18, a group of 13 netizens, including prominent human rights lawyer Tang Jingling, circulated an open letter that criticized Tencent for going beyond government controls on online expression and aggressively depriving users of services on its chatroom program QQ (see CMB No. [68](#)). The letter asked the company to apologize for frequently shutting down conversations and freezing individual accounts when users discuss sensitive topics. Chinese internet companies are required to comply with government censorship directives, but they have a degree of discretion on enforcement. They also benefit from the exclusion of uncensored foreign rivals like Facebook and Twitter from the Chinese market. At the same time, the government encourages the Chinese firms to expand internationally, raising questions about whether and how domestic controls should be applied to foreign users, and how this might affect the companies' global competitiveness.

- *Wall Street Journal* 1/15/2013: [China's Tencent apologizes for message problems](#)
  - BBC 1/14/2013: [China's Tencent denies WeChat app global censorship](#)
  - *Tech in Asia* 1/10/2013: [Now China's WeChat App is censoring its users globally](#)
  - The Next Web 1/11/2013: [Tencent's WeChat comes under fire for international censorship practices](#)
  - Radio Free Asia 1/18/2013: [Netizens slam Tencent over ban](#)
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## 'Skyfall,' 'Cloud Atlas' censored before reaching China theaters

Nearly three months after its global release, *Skyfall*, the latest film from the James Bond spy franchise, began showing in cinemas in China on January 21. Several scenes that were deemed morally or politically damaging to China's image were altered or removed (see CMB No. [74](#)). According to media reports, a scene in which a French hit man kills a Chinese security guard in Shanghai was cut, as were references to prostitution in Macau and torture by Chinese authorities. On January 21, in an odd move for a pillar of China's censorship and propaganda apparatus, state-run Xinhua news agency urged reforms of the film censorship system, saying deletions were not made according to clear criteria. The commentary identified *Skyfall's* deleted scenes and quoted a Shanghai-based film professor as saying that aside from enforcing existing legal controls on depictions of nudity or extreme violence, "regulators should respect the producer's original ideas, rather than chopping scenes arbitrarily." On January 23, Shanghai's *Dongfang Daily* reported that the German science fiction drama *Cloud Atlas*, which would be released in China the following week, had been cut by 35 minutes, mainly for violence and nudity. A January 15 article in the *New York Times* described Hollywood's ongoing struggle to navigate China's nebulous censorship system and develop films that are unlikely to encounter bureaucratic roadblocks. Directors told the *Times* that in addition to postproduction censorship for Chinese screenings, officials have begun quietly monitoring film shoots in China for movies like *Iron Man 3*, meaning international audiences may also be presented with products that have been adjusted to please Chinese censors. While some filmmakers likened oversight by China's State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) to the ratings system of the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), MPAA ratings board chairwoman Joan Graves noted that the U.S. system, a creation of the private film and theater industry, was voluntary in nature.

- *South China Morning Post* 1/23/2013: [State media slams censors after Skyfall cuts](#)
- BBC 1/21/2013: [Censored Bond film Skyfall opens in China](#)
- Xinhua 1/21/2013 (in Chinese): [007 release brings attention to China's film censorship](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 1/23/2013: [China censors cut 40 minutes off science fiction epic Cloud Atlas](#)
- *New York Times* 1/15/2013: [To get movies into China, Hollywood gives censors a preview](#)

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

[\*Freedom in the World 2013\*](#)  
[\*Freedom on the Net 2012\*](#)  
[\*Freedom of the Press 2012\*](#)

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