



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

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PHOTO OF THE WEEK: DEFACED BY CENSORSHIP



Credit: [Global Voices](#)

BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS



Watchdog reports rising curbs on foreign press in China

On February 14, the New York–based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) published the latest edition of its annual report *Attacks on the Press*, covering events in 2012. The China chapter highlighted an increase in restrictions on foreign media during the year. Among other obstructions, accreditation processes were tightened, and the de facto expulsion of Al-Jazeera correspondent Melissa Chan marked the first incident of its kind since 1998. The report found that Chan’s case “cast a chill over the entire press corps because the motivation was unknown” (see CMB No. [57](#)). CPJ also noted the reluctance of Chinese leaders Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping to hold news conferences during their travels abroad, and the fact that foreign governments had only a “limited ability” to influence the Chinese authorities regarding conditions for correspondents from their countries. In a continuation of the pattern of harassment and restrictions from 2012, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported on February 19 that its journalists had been briefly detained and their video recordings confiscated when they attempted to film a building in Shanghai that had recently been identified as the headquarters of a Chinese military unit dedicated to transnational cyberespionage (see below). Separately, on February 20, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that its article about a successful banker who was passed over for Communist Party promotion had been blocked within hours of publication in English and Chinese on February 19, along with a post on the microblogging site Sina Weibo that linked to the piece. The *Journal* is among several major U.S. news outlets that have reported China-based computer hacking in recent weeks, and two—the *New York Times* and Bloomberg News—have had their websites blocked in China for a number of months (see CMB No. [80](#)).

- CPJ 2/14/2013: [Disdain for foreign press undercuts China’s global ambition](#)
- *New York Times* 2/14/2013: [Report sees journalists increasingly under attack](#)
- BBC News 1/19/2013: [BBC reporter detained investigating China hacking](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 2/20/2013: [China censors WSJ story on top banker’s stalled political career](#)

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Key bloggers barred from social media after ‘sensitive’ remarks

Over the past week, a number of influential users on domestic microblogging sites have had their accounts closed with no clear explanation, though the moves seemed designed to encourage self-censorship on politically sensitive topics. On February 17, former Google China chief executive Kai-fu Lee announced on his Twitter account that he had been locked out of the popular Chinese microblogging platforms Tencent and Sina Weibo. Lee had over 30 million followers on Sina Weibo, which last month ranked him first among the “100 Most Influential Weibo Celebrities” (see CMB No. [79](#)). The lockout incident occurred after Lee made unfavorable remarks about the Communist Party–run search engine Jike and its party-appointed chief executive, former table-tennis

champion Deng Yaping, amid reports that the engine had spent 2 billion yuan (\$320 million) without turning a profit and had gained only a miniscule share of the search market. In a Weibo post, Li questioned Deng's leadership and asked whether it was necessary to use taxpayers' money to develop a search engine without any commitment to the open sharing of information. Jike, launched in 2011, has struggled to win over users with search results that lean heavily toward the party line, as colorfully described by David Bandurski of the China Media Project. On February 8, prominent human rights lawyer Pu Zhiqiang was banned from Sina Weibo, Tencent, and a third social-media site, Sohu, after he criticized Zhou Yongkang, China's former internal security chief. Pu said he opened two new accounts the next day and a third one on February 14, but all were deleted by censors. On February 20, former Taiwanese premier Frank Hsieh Chang-ting's two accounts on Sina Weibo were also shut down. Although he did not make any critical comments, he did post generic thoughts on constitutionalism and freedom of speech. Previously the chairman of Taiwan's pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party, Hsieh made his first posting on February 6. A netizen responded, "Let's see how long you can keep your account."

- *Atlantic* 2/19/2013: [How China's most influential micro-blogger got himself banned from Weibo](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 2/19/2013: [Painful publicity for Communist Party search engine](#)
- *China Media Project* 2/18/2013: [You've been Jiked!](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 2/20/2013: [Human rights lawyer banned from mainland microblogging site](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 2/21/2013: [Former Taiwan premier's Chinese weibo account deleted](#)



Investigative report describes illegal web-deletion business

On February 18, the Beijing-based magazine *Caixin* released an investigative report on China's "black PR" companies, which specialize in manipulating the online reputations of their clients (see CMB No. 51). The article, which was quickly deleted from the magazine's website, focused on two public-relations companies founded by Gu Dengda, Xinxun Media and Yage Times. During a police raid of their offices in July 2012, more than 100 employees were detained. Yage reportedly earned over 50 million yuan (\$7.9 million) in revenue in 2011 through a carefully orchestrated business that typically involved three parties—the PR company itself, staff at a given web portal, and the internet police. These and similar black PR companies allegedly bribed web administrators or state censors to delete targeted content, bribed officials to issue formal removal notices, or used fake government stamps to forge the notices. Deleting a post costs at least 1,000 yuan (\$150), while getting a keyword blocked in searches costs over 100,000 yuan (\$16,000). According to *Caixin*, Yage's clients included high-profile Chinese companies such as state-run China Mobile as well as foreign enterprises like Pizza Hut and Yoshinoya. However, about 60 percent of the firm's profits reportedly came from government officials in second- and third-tier Chinese cities.

- *Tech in Asia* 2/19/2013: [A shocking expose of China's black PR industry implicates government officials, is quickly deleted from the web](#)
- 2/18/2013 (in Chinese): [Posting deletion business: A gray supply chain](#)
- *Caixin* 2/19/2013: [Dirty business for China's internet scrubbers](#)



Short-lived ‘fan club’ blog belies Xi’s call for public critique of party

A Sina Weibo microblog account called “Study Xi Fan Club” that touted Chinese Communist Party leader Xi Jinping gained international attention last week. The account, which was created in November, featured a series of up-to-date candid snapshots of Xi on his travels in rural China. It gained more than 800,000 followers and apparently aroused the envy of state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV), which typically enjoys the closest media access to Chinese leaders. CCTV posted on its microblog, “What happened? The Study Xi Fan Club is quicker and closer to him than us.” Amid suspicions that the account was being run by one of Xi’s aides, a migrant worker named Zhang Hongming told the Associated Press in a February 9 interview that he had created the site to make “the public feel closer to their leader with timeline and transparent information.” Zhang, a college dropout from Sichuan Province, said the fact that he had not been approached by officials showed that the Chinese leadership was becoming more open. However, on February 11, he abruptly announced with “remorse and regret” that he would no longer update the microblog. Though Zhang did not explain the reason, netizens speculated that he had come under pressure from authorities, particularly after he spoke with foreign media. Xi has called on the Communist Party to improve its ethical and governance standards, urging it to “put up with sharp criticism” from the public in a speech at a Chinese New Year reception in Beijing on February 6, but the government has continued to crack down on its critics in practice. On the day after the speech, Sichuan-based netizen Cheng Aihua was detained by police on charges of “inciting subversion of state power,” having left a comment on the microblog dedicated to Xi that read, “All manners of ugly bootlicking to please the emperor. We on the other hand would work harder to seek justice for all who have died in earthquakes, school-bus accidents, floods and brutal abortions.” Cheng was released on February 11 and the charges downgraded, but searches for her blogging pseudonym were blocked on Sina Weibo.

- Asian Correspondent 2/11/2013: [China: Dissident voice silenced as Xi calls for open criticism](#)
- BBC Chinese 2/9/2013 (in Chinese): [Sichuan female netizen detained for criticizing Xi Jinping fans](#)
- BBC 2/7/2013: [Mystery of Xi Jinping’s ‘fan club’ blogger](#)
- *Beijing Cream* 2/10/2013: [The mystery man behind popular Xi Jinping microblog is a college dropout and migrant worker](#)
- Associated Press 2/9/2013: [AP Exclusive: Mysterious China blogger comes out](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 2/12/2013: [Xi’s top fan calls it quits on blog site after coming clean](#)

HONG KONG



Activist jailed for desecrating Chinese, Hong Kong flags

Hong Kong-based activist Koo Sze-yiu was sentenced to nine months in prison by a magistrate’s court on February 7, having burned or otherwise damaged Chinese and Hong Kong flags at public protests in June 2012 and January 2013. The conviction on four charges—three for desecrating the

People's Republic of China (PRC) flag and a fourth for desecrating the Hong Kong flag—prompted local human rights groups to gather on February 17 outside Stanley Prison, where they submitted a petition with more than 50,000 signatures that called for Koo's immediate release. Koo said he defaced the flags to demonstrate his opposition to the central government's handling of dissidents, including jailed Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo and the late labor rights activist Li Wangyang, whose suspicious death in June 2012 was ruled a suicide despite widespread public doubts (see CMB No. [65](#)). Koo was also protesting Hong Kong chief executive Leung Chun-ying's perceived closeness to Beijing. According to the *South China Morning Post*, Koo reacted to the unusually harsh sentence with defiance, telling the court, "When I am released, I will do this again." Defacing flags in Hong Kong can draw prison terms of up to three years under the National Flag and National Emblem Ordinance. The territory's semidemocratic system generally guarantees a higher degree of freedom of expression than is permitted on the mainland, but the ban on flag desecration was upheld in a 1999 court ruling. While some democratic countries retain similar bans, the courts in others, including the United States, have found that defacing the national flag is a constitutionally protected form of speech and cannot be criminalized. In an indication that Hong Kong's law applies even to the digital sphere, *Apple Daily* reported on February 7 that the local police had arrested a netizen on January 6 after he posted an image of a defaced Chinese flag. Many netizens expressed their discontent with the arrest by posting their own images of altered PRC flags, some of which poked fun at Beijing's censorship practices. One netizen replaced the stars on the Chinese flag with "river crabs", a common slang term for censorship in the Chinese blogosphere (see photo).

- **Global Voices 2/9/2013:** [Hong Kong activist jailed for burning Chinese flag](#)
- **Agence France Presse 2/8/2013:** [Hong Kong activist jailed for burning Chinese flag](#)
- **Epoch Times 2/19/2013:** [Hong Kong activists protest harsh sentence for flag burning](#)
- **South China Morning Post 2/8/2013:** [Diaoyu Islands activist 'proudly' jailed for flag burning](#)
- **Apple Daily 2/7/2013 (in Chinese):** [Netizen detained by police for desecrating flags](#)

BEYOND CHINA



Report traces U.S. cyberattacks to Shanghai military unit

Mandiant, a Virginia-based computer security company, released a 60-page report on February 19 that detailed extensive evidence of the Chinese military's links to large-scale hacking of American government and corporate computer systems. Mandiant found that Unit 61398 of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), known to researchers in the United States as "Comment Crew" or "Shanghai Group," marshals an estimated 2,000 personnel dedicated to infiltrating English-language sites. From its headquarters in Gaoqiao, Shanghai, the Comment Crew reportedly hacked at least 115 U.S. companies across 20 industries, from military contractors and chemical plants to mining companies and satellite and telecommunication enterprises. The longest attack documented by Mandiant lasted four years and 10 months. The largest recorded theft of data was 6.5 terabytes from a single target over 10 months. Mandiant found that Unit 61398 had stolen proprietary information such as technology blueprints and manufacturing processes. A 2009 attack on the beverage

conglomerate Coca-Cola coincided with the company's failed attempt to acquire China's Huiyuan Juice Group, fueling speculation that the hackers were seeking access to the U.S. company's negotiation strategy for the \$2.4 billion deal. According to the *New York Times*, the Mandiant report is the first public analysis on Unit 61398 and its methods amid growing suspicions of state-backed Chinese cyberattacks, though the Virginia-based think tank Project 2049 had released a report in October 2012 that similarly described the PLA's alleged hacking operations (see CMB No. 73). The Chinese government denied Mandiant's claims on the day of the release and said the accusations were "irresponsible and unprofessional."

- *New York Times* 2/18/2013: [Chinese army unit is seen as tied to hacking against U.S.](#)
- *Daily Beast* 2/19/2013: [This is how China hacks America: Inside the Mandiant report](#)
- Mandiant Intelligence Center Report: [APT1: Exposing one of China's cyber espionage units](#)



Taiwan regulator rejects cable merger, proposes antimonopoly rules

On February 20, Taiwan's media regulator, the National Communications Commission (NCC), rejected Want Want Broadband's bid to acquire China Network Systems (CNS) after the group failed to meet the three conditions set by the NCC in July 2012 (see CMB No. 66). Want Want Broadband is a subsidiary of Taiwan's Want Want Group conglomerate, whose owner, Tsai Eng-meng, is known for his friendly relations with the Chinese government. Tsai was also involved in a recent deal to acquire the Taiwan assets of Hong Kong media mogul Jimmy Lai's Next Media Group (see CMB No. 75). The NCC previously granted conditional approval for the CNS purchase, requiring Tsai and his associates to avoid any involvement in the management of CtiTV, a news channel controlled by Want Want. The regulator also instructed Want Want's China Television station to establish a mechanism to ensure its editorial independence and switch its digital news channel to nonnews content. Want Want attempted to meet the NCC conditions by placing 75 percent of the shares of CtiTV in a trust with the Industrial Bank of Taiwan in December. Regulators said that arrangement would leave the controlling relations between the owner and the property unchanged, thereby failing to meet the NCC conditions and contributing to the rejection. However, the NCC said Want Want could submit another application if it found another way to meet the conditions. Also on February 20, the NCC introduced a draft proposal that would place restrictions on media cross-ownership if a given merger resulted in one conglomerate obtaining market share above a certain threshold. Freedom of expression advocates have warned that Tsai's growing media empire could limit news diversity and increase Beijing's indirect influence on the Taiwanese press.

- *Taipei Times* 2/21/2013: [Want Want-CNS merger rules not met](#)
- *China Post* 2/21/2013: [Want Want bid to buy CNS rejected by NCC](#)
- *Liberty Times* 2/21/2013 (in Chinese): [Want Want CNS bid rejected, three conditions not met](#)



Rules on foreign artists reportedly tightened after Elton John show

Britain's *Guardian* newspaper reported on February 10 that the Chinese government had tightened rules on permits for performances by foreign musicians after British pop icon Elton John shocked the authorities by publicly dedicating his November 2012 Beijing concert to prominent Chinese dissident artist and blogger Ai Weiwei (see CMB No. [75](#)). According to the paper, John was questioned by the police shortly after the performance, and his manager was asked to sign a statement saying that the dedication was only meant to honor Ai's artistic talent, as opposed to his vocal criticism of the authorities. Days later, Culture Minister Cai Wu reportedly issued an order requiring foreign artists to hold university degrees to perform in the country, a stipulation that would exclude John and many others. Since January 2013, classical musicians from abroad have been asked to submit proof of degrees and other qualifications before launching tours in China. However, despite reports of increased rejections of permit applications, the Culture Ministry told the *Guardian* that there were no new regulations in place.

- *Guardian* 2/10/2013: [China tightens concert rules after Elton John's 'disrespectful' Beijing show](#)
- *NME* 2/11/2013: [Elton John controversy forces scrutiny on foreign performers in China](#)



Canadian university to close Confucius Institute

McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, announced on February 7 that it would shut down its Confucius Institute in July due to religious discrimination in the Chinese state-run program's hiring practices. A McMaster spokeswoman told the *Globe and Mail* that "We ... felt that it didn't reflect the way the university would do hiring. We have a very clear direction on building an inclusive community, respect for diversity, and the ability to speak about those." The institute, opened in 2008, offers courses on Chinese language and culture and forms part of a network of over 300 such facilities around the world, including 11 others in Canada. Funding and instructors are provided by the Chinese government. McMaster decided not to renew its agreement with the Confucius Institute program for another five-year term. The decision was prompted in part by complaints from instructor Sonia Zhao, who reported that the conditions of her employment included a contractual ban on practicing Falun Gong, a spiritual movement that is fiercely persecuted by the Chinese Communist Party. She initially kept her beliefs to herself after arriving in Canada in 2011, but she later joined activities of the local Falun Gong community in Ontario. She left her job at McMaster that year and filed a case with the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal in 2012, challenging the discriminatory hiring practices and asserting McMaster's indirect responsibility, as the institute is formally part of the university. Confucius Institutes have been criticized in a number of countries for serving as vehicles for Chinese government propaganda and censorship, and university faculty have raised concerns about their potential to mute campus discussions on topics that Beijing regards as politically sensitive (see CMB Nos. [62](#), [73](#)).

- *Globe and Mail* 2/7/2013: [McMaster closing Confucius Institute over hiring issues](#)
- NTDTV 2/14/2013: [McMaster to close Confucius Institute over discrimination](#)
- CBC News 2/11/2013: [McMaster cuts Chinese institute, worried by discrimination](#)