



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

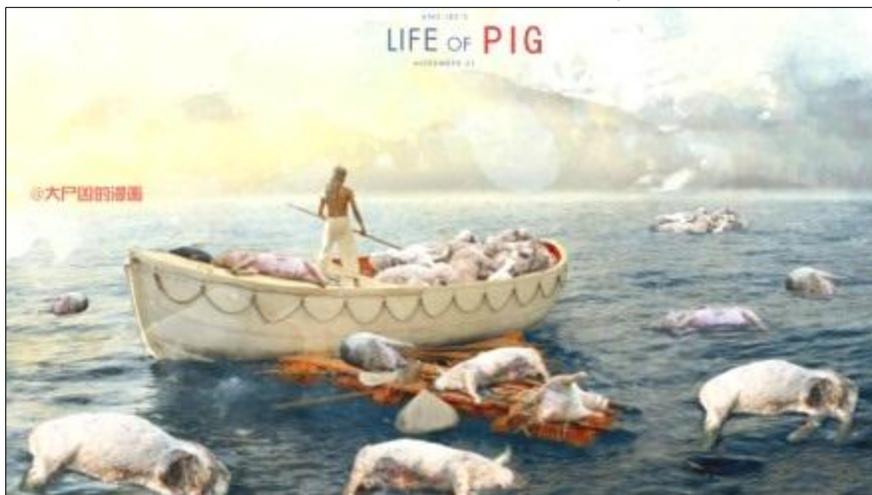
*A biweekly update of press freedom and censorship news
related to the People's Republic of China*

Issue 83: March 21, 2013

Headlines

- As new premier urges media scrutiny, censorship continues
- Netizens mock presidential 'election,' lone dissenting vote
- CCTV accused of fabricating anti-Apple microblog posts
- Mobile phones screened in Tibet, patriotic singer imprisoned
- Confucius Institutes plan further global expansion

PHOTO OF THE WEEK: YEAR OF SNAKE, MONTH OF PIG



Credit: [China Media Project](#)

BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS



As new premier urges media scrutiny, censorship continues

As the two annual sessions of China's rubber-stamp parliament and advisory body—the National People's Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CCPCC)—wrapped up in Beijing last week, the NPC delegates “elected” Communist Party general secretary Xi Jinping as president and Li Keqiang as premier. Following his predecessor's example, Li held a press conference with local and foreign journalists that was aired live on national television on March 17. Li appeared confident, relaxed, and down-to-earth in his speaking style as he promised to tackle inequality, corruption, and environmental pollution. But also following previous practice, he took no unscripted questions, only those submitted and approved in advance, while some foreign news outlets, like the *New York Times*, were not allowed to attend. Li encouraged the media and public to hold him accountable if his government fails to clean up the country's water and food supplies. However, if the censorship surrounding the two sessions is any indication, journalists will continue to face obstacles in any attempt to critique the leadership. According to Ivan Zhai of Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*, several Beijing-based journalists complained of tighter restrictions and more prior censorship than usual, and netizens reported that posts with the terms HuWen (referring to outgoing president Hu Jintao and outgoing premier Wen Jiabao) and XiLi (referring to Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang) were being blocked on the Sina Weibo microblogging service. Meanwhile, directives from the Central Propaganda Department that were leaked online included instructions not to report without permission on reforms of the State Council's structure and to adhere to copy from the state-run Xinhua news agency when reporting on the new leadership, for instance by carefully reproducing the order of listed officials. A directive from Guangdong's provincial propaganda department added, “You cannot debate or pass judgment on the results of the election in your coverage.”

- *Christian Science Monitor* 3/17/2013: [China's Premier Li meets the press—but no unscripted questions, thank you](#)
- *New York Times* 3/17/2013: [In China, new premier says he seeks a just society](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 3/8/2013: [China: New leadership, same old censorship](#)
- *China Digital Times* 3/10/2013: [Ministry of Truth: State Council; Korla, Xinjiang](#)
- *China Digital Times* 3/14/2013: [Ministry of Truth: Pig cremation, elections](#)



Xi Jinping woos public with affable image

According to media reports, the Chinese authorities have adopted a successful public relations strategy to boost the personal image of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leader Xi Jinping, who officially became China's president on March 14. The campaign, though it resembled those prevalent in other countries, especially during election periods, was unusual for senior government officials in Beijing. Despite being prominent among the CCP's “princelings”—the privileged offspring of revolutionary heroes from the Mao Zedong era—Xi has presented himself as a plainspoken and

unpretentious man (see CMB No. [79](#)). His apology for being more than an hour late to a public event in November 2012 quickly generated online discussion. His more natural speaking style, in sharp contrast to his predecessors' wooden delivery and dense party jargon, has also earned praise from Chinese netizens. The new approach appears to reflect official recognition that the party must do more to win over an increasingly well-informed and disillusioned public, which is able to share opinions and spread uncensored information via social media. In another novel development, Xi's wife, Peng Liyuan, has begun to play a larger role after previously keeping a low profile in state media (see CMB No. [75](#)). As a famous folk singer and World Health Organization ambassador for AIDS issues, a sensitive topic in China, she is expected to help Xi expand China's "soft power" abroad. The *Financial Times* reported on March 13 that she would make an independent appearance in Durban, South Africa, as her husband attends the March 25–27 BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) summit. Despite the popular appeal of Xi's more humble and accessible style, some observers have warned that it could lead to a backlash if concrete reforms do not follow. In the meantime, the authorities retain tight control over the new leader's image. Jia Juchuan, a party historian who wrote the biography of Xi's father, told the *Washington Post* that he had been harassed and interrogated after giving interviews to foreign media outlets last year. Expressing concerns that his book would be revised to meet new political priorities, he said, "Now that he's become China's leader, anything to do with Xi is a much more sensitive topic." The website of Bloomberg News has been blocked in China since it reported on Xi's family wealth in mid-2012.

- *Washington Post* 3/13/2013: [China's Xi Jinping charts a new PR course](#)
- *Financial Times* 3/13/2013: [Xi's wife to play role in Chinese charm offensive](#)
- *Atlantic* 3/14/2013: [China's hip new first lady](#)



Film and broadcast regulator to merge with print watchdog

As part of official efforts to consolidate resources and cope with excessive bureaucracy, China's State Council on March 10 announced that two media regulators—the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) and the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT)—would be merged into one entity called the State General Administration of Press, Publications, Radio, Film, and Television. The agency, which would be led by former SARFT chief Cai Fuchao, generated heated discussion over its tedious name, the final version of which has a total of 10 characters in Chinese, down from 14 in an earlier version. "How awkward the name will sound and what a waste of paper and ink it will be if it's printed out," one netizen remarked. At a conference on March 19, the deputy chief of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Propaganda Department, Luo Shugang, said the merger would improve "management of ideology" and help innovate China's media development. However, prominent Beijing-based communications professor Qiao Mu argued that despite the attempt to reduce red tape, the new agency would likely continue to control the treatment of "sensitive content," under the influence of the party's propaganda department.

- *BBC China* 3/10/2013 (in Chinese): [China State Council announced organizational reform plans](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 3/17/2013: [Unwieldy agency name speaks volumes about Beijing's bloat](#)

- **Xinhua 3/20/2013 (in Chinese): [Central government appoints State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television leadership](#)**
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British reporter detained in Beijing during live broadcast

Mark Stone, an Asia correspondent for Britain’s Sky News, was detained live on air on March 15 while reporting on China’s leadership transition from Beijing’s Tiananmen Square. Shortly after he mentioned the 1989 Tiananmen Square crackdown—a topic that is considered highly sensitive by the Chinese authorities—several security officers appeared and put Stone and his cameraman into a van. They were later confined for hours in an unidentified building, where Stone said, into the camera, that the police likely assumed he was recording rather than transmitting, meaning the footage could be erased. An English-speaking officer who noticed the live broadcast immediately asked the cameraman to switch off his equipment. Stone insisted throughout that the team had obtained official permission to film in the square. The journalists were finally released after four hours of questioning. Stone noted that the police had been “utterly civil,” though violence against foreign journalists is not unusual in China. In February, a German television crew was attacked, allegedly by local party thugs, in a rural area of Hebei Province, prompting the German government to summon Chinese diplomats in Berlin to protest the assault (see CMB No. [82](#)).

- ***Washington Post* 3/15/2013: [Video: Chinese police detain British reporter, unaware he’s broadcasting live throughout](#)**
 - ***Sky News* 3/15/2013: [China detains Sky correspondent in Beijing](#)**
 - ***Huffington Post* 3/15/2013: [Mark Stone, Sky news reporter, detained live on air in China](#)**
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NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Netizens mock presidential ‘election,’ lone dissenting vote

On March 14, the rubber-stamp National People’s Congress (NPC) “elected” Communist Party general secretary Xi Jinping as China’s president with a vote of 2,952 to 1, with 3 abstentions. State media praised Xi for gaining the most votes since Mao Zedong (Xi’s two immediate predecessors, Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin, had 3 and 35 dissenters, respectively), but netizens speculated on the identity of the lone dissenter and poked fun at the predetermined outcome of the vote, at least until censors caught wind and deleted many of the comments. Eric Fish, an editor at the Beijing-based *Economic Observer*, noted that Xi’s 99.86 percent vote yield was just ahead of the 97.62 percent popular vote attributed to Syria’s Bashar al-Assad in 2007 and just short of former North Korean leader Kim Jong Il’s 99.98 percent People’s Assembly win in 2009. A string of other posts on the Sina Weibo microblogging platform mimicked live news analysis of an imaginary competitive election, with comments like “As of 9pm, Xi [Jinping] and Li [Keqiang] stood neck-to-neck with a

difference of only 54,250 votes,” “There’s no doubt Xi will win in his home province,” and “Shanghai’s decision to require non-local voters to return to their *hukou* districts to obtain proof of voter eligibility is being challenged by the Xi camp.” Perhaps the most sardonic comment was: “Of course, we won’t know the results until the last minute. If the losing candidate refuses to accept the results, he can always appeal [to] the Supreme People’s Court to arbitrate.” Many Chinese netizens closely followed recent national elections in countries like the United States and Taiwan, adding to public awareness of the gaps between China’s system and democracy (see CMB No. [73](#)).

- **Global Voices 3/15/2013:** [China’s social media censored after new president draws lone opposing vote](#)
- **Time 3/14/2013:** [China’s new president Xi Jinping met with mysterious lone vote of dissent](#)
- **South China Morning Post 3/14/2013:** [China’s fake presidential election inspires fake election fever](#)



CCTV accused of fabricating anti-Apple microblog posts

State broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) recently faced criticism after an unusual post on a celebrity’s Sina Weibo microblog account generated suspicions that the station had orchestrated a smear campaign against the U.S. technology giant Apple. On March 15, a few hours after CCTV aired a program for World Consumer Rights Day in which Apple was accused of providing Chinese consumers with poor customer and warranty services, a Weibo posting on the account of popular Taiwanese actor Peter Ho read, “#315isLive# Wow, Apple has so many tricks in its after-sales services. As an Apple fan, I’m hurt. You think this would be acceptable to Steve Jobs? Or to those young people who sold their kidneys [to buy iPads]? It’s really true that big chains treat customers poorly. Post around 8:20.” The entry’s last sentence, “Post around 8:20,” immediately sparked heated discussion among Chinese netizens, who said it appeared that Ho had forgotten to remove “instructions” from CCTV. Users noted that a string of other postings critical of Apple had emerged around that time. Amid speculation that CCTV and Weibo had supplied celebrities with text to post on their accounts, Ho denied that he had written the entry, claiming that his account was “hacked.” The #PostAround8:20 hashtag quickly went viral, with user comments indicating deep mistrust of the state broadcaster; among other faults, CCTV has been criticized in the past for false or misleading reports on consumer products (see CMB No. [44](#)). “Would the all-powerful CCTV please tell us which brands haven’t discriminated against the people of this Heavenly Kingdom? Post around 8:20,” one netizen wrote. Entries with the hashtag were later censored by Weibo administrators.

- **Atlantic 3/18/2013:** [Did CCTV hire celebrities to bash Apple on Weibo?](#)
- **China Media Project 3/18/2013:** [Did CCTV conspire to smear Apple?](#)
- **Wall Street Journal 3/19/2013:** [Apple attack backfires for state broadcaster](#)



State media, censors, netizens respond to flotilla of pig carcasses

Weeks after thousands of dead pigs began appearing in Shanghai's Huangpu River on March 7, state media continued to put a positive spin on the phenomenon, despite growing concerns over the region's water quality and a lack of answers as to who dumped the animals and how they died. The official Xinhua news agency reported that the carcasses did not carry infectious diseases, and reports by the Communist Party-owned *Global Times* assured readers that tap water was safe to use. According to *Shanghai Daily*, pork available at Shanghai's markets was "up to standard," and "online rumors" tracing the dead pigs to local farms and factories were "false." The Central Propaganda Department reportedly sent two separate directives, on March 14 and 19, prohibiting media outlets from conducting independent investigations on the issue. Instead, they were ordered to use information released by Xinhua and local authorities. With more than 14,000 pig carcasses retrieved from the river and nearby waterways as of March 18, many Chinese netizens, after an initial wave of shock and disgust, posted sarcastic comments on the popular microblogging platform Sina Weibo. Some appreciated the fact that at least the pigs were not found on dining tables, as tainted food is not unusual in the country. One user wrote, "From in the mouth to in the water, it's an improvement." Former Google China chief executive Kai-fu Lee, whose widely followed Weibo account was suspended for three days in February after he criticized a party-run search engine (see CMB No. [81](#)), posted a joke that compared the pig dumping to Beijing's severe air pollution: "A Beijinger says, 'We are the luckiest, we open the window and get a free smoke.' The Shanghaier replies, 'So what, we turn on the tap and get pork rib soup!'" (see CMB No. [78](#)).

- International Federation of Journalists 3/19/2013: [Chinese premier urged to lift ban on reporting pigs' deaths](#)
- NBC News 3/18/2013: [China river's dead pig toll passes 13,000 but officials say water quality is 'normal'](#)
- *Shanghai Daily* 3/18/2013: [Dead pig numbers keep falling](#)
- *Global Times* 3/11/2013: [Dead pigs threaten waterway](#)
- *China Digital Times* 3/20/2013: [Ministry of Truth: Hogwash dealt with effectively](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 3/15/2013: [What's in China's water?](#)
- Offbeat China 3/12/2013: [Why some Chinese netizens are happy about the 6000 dead pigs in Shanghai river](#)
- *Washington Post* 3/20/2013: [Flood of dead pigs, trickle of answers in China](#)

TIBET



Mobile phone screening begins, patriotic singer imprisoned

According to the Dharamsala-based Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD), the Chinese authorities launched a campaign to search Tibetans' mobile telephones in Lhasa, Tibet's capital, on March 10, the anniversary of the 1959 Tibetan uprising against Chinese Communist Party rule. A team of experts from Beijing first visited Drepung Monastery on March 8. Other Buddhist monasteries will also be subject to inspection over the coming months. The team reportedly planned to stay at each location for at least four days, searching for individuals who have shared information

about Tibet with people based in foreign countries. Separately, on February 23, popular Tibetan singer Lolo was sentenced to six years in prison for performing “politically charged” songs. He was first detained in April 2012, following the release of an album entitled *Raise the Flag of Tibet, Sons of the Snow* that called for Tibet’s independence (see CMB No. [55](#)). His whereabouts remain unknown. Tibetan writers, bloggers, intellectuals, and cultural figures are frequently targeted by the Chinese police due to their influence on fellow Tibetans.

- **China Human Rights Briefing 3/15/2013:** [\[CHRD\] Several Tibetans sent to prison; petitioners detained during “sensitive” period, and more \(3/9-3/15, 2013\)](#)
- **Phayul 3/13/2013:** [Popular Tibetan singer Lo Lo sentenced to six years](#)
- **TCHRD 3/11/2013:** [China launches crackdown on personal cellphones in Lhasa](#)

HONG KONG



Reporters assaulted in Beijing as activists attempt Liu Xia visit

The Hong Kong Journalists Association and the Hong Kong Press Photographers Association organized a protest outside Beijing’s Liaison Office on March 16, after a group of local journalists were assaulted in mainland China on March 8. The group, which included crews from Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK), TVB, and nowTV, encountered plainclothes police at a residential compound in Beijing where they were filming several activists’ attempt to visit Liu Xia, the wife of jailed Nobel Peace Prize laureate and democracy advocate Liu Xiaobo. According to Hong Kong media reports, a cameraman was beaten and pushed to the ground, and an RTHK reporter was injured in the scuffle. Hong Kong activist Yang Kuang, who was detained along with his mainland colleagues for “provoking quarrels and making trouble,” was escorted to the Beijing airport and put on a flight back to Hong Kong on March 10. Liu Xia has been under illegal house arrest since her husband was announced as the Nobel winner in October 2010 (see CMB No. [82](#)).

- **Agence France-Presse 3/9/2013:** [Anger over attack on Hong Kong journalists in China](#)
- **RTHK 3/16/2013:** [Protest over attacks on journalists](#)
- **Radio Free Asia 3/8/2012:** [Police detain activists near Lu Xia’s home](#)
- **South China Morning Post 3/11/2013:** [‘Troublesome’ Hong Kong activist Yang Kuang sent home from Beijing](#)

BEYOND CHINA



U.S. officials raise cyberattacks issue with Beijing

Speaking at the Asia Society in New York on March 11, U.S. national security adviser Tom Donilon urged the Chinese government to adhere to “acceptable norms of behavior in cyberspace.” The

demand marked the first time that the U.S. government had publicly confronted Beijing on the issue of cyberespionage. It came two days after China's foreign minister, Yang Jiechi, dismissed mounting evidence that the Chinese military has been involved in infiltrating the computers of U.S. corporations and government agencies (see CMB No. [81](#)), though Yang also called for "rules and cooperation, not war" in cyberspace. On March 19, new Chinese president Xi Jinping held his first official meeting with newly appointed U.S. treasury secretary Jack Lew, and the two reportedly discussed internet security, among other issues, during their 45-minute private session.

- *Financial Times* 3/15/2013: [Lew set for cyber talks with Beijing](#)
- *New York Times* 3/11/2013: [U.S. demands China block cyberattacks and agree to rules](#)
- *China Daily* 3/11/2013: [China calls for cyber rules](#)
- *Guardian* 3/20/2013: [Chinese president Xi Jinping tackles cyber-attacks in first US talks](#)



Confucius Institutes plan further global expansion

China's state-funded Confucius Institutes (CI) program announced on March 11 that it aims to have a presence in 500 cities around the world by 2020. The program, which was launched in 2004, offers language and cultural studies courses in 400 facilities scattered across more than 100 countries and regions (see CMB No. [81](#)). According to Xu Lin, chief of CI headquarters, also known as Hanban, there would be 1.5 million registered students by 2015, though a fresh emphasis on teacher training and textbook development would be needed to close existing gaps. CIs have been praised by the Communist Party propaganda department at home, but criticized in a number of countries for spreading official propaganda and encouraging self-censorship by instructors. At a public event on March 12, Kyrgyzstan vice prime minister Camilla Talieva praised the CI branch in Bishkek, which she said had helped strengthen bilateral ties. With a visit to Russia by Chinese president Xi Jinping set to begin on March 22, state-run Xinhua news agency reported on March 19 that there are more than 20 Confucius classrooms across that country, with off-site programs in middle and primary schools that have attracted 4,000 students in the past six years.

- Xinhua 3/11/2013: [China's Confucius Institutes to reach 500 global cities by 2020](#)
- Xinhua 3/19/2013: [Feature: Confucius nurtures Russian students in Chinese learning](#)
- Xinhua 3/12/2013: [Confucius Institute contributes to China-Kyrgyzstan ties: senior official](#)

NOTABLE ANALYSIS



Four new studies on media and internet censorship in China

- **Actual Weibo usage:** In a study published on March 8, researchers at Hong Kong University shared findings involving user activity on the Sina Weibo microblogging platform. Analyzing a

sample of 30,000 users, they found that 57 percent had no posts on their timeline, and only 1 percent posted at least 20 messages over a period of seven days. Applied to Sina's 503 million reported users, those figures would suggest that only around 30 million write a unique post in a given week, highlighting the degree to which communication in the "Weibosphere" still reflects only a small percentage of China's overall population.

- **Plos 3/18/2013:** [Reality check for the Chinese microblog space: A random sampling approach](#)
 - **Wall Street Journal 3/12/2013:** [How many people really use Sina Weibo?](#)
- **Speed of Weibo deletion:** In a paper posted online on March 4, a team of academic researchers from the United States shared findings on the speed with which censors at Sina Weibo delete messages containing sensitive content. The study's sample focused on users identified as likely to participate in sensitive discussions. The researchers found that deletions occur most heavily within the first hours after a post has been submitted, with nearly 30 percent occurring within the first 30 minutes and 90 percent within the first 24 hours. The study identifies other interesting patterns, including evidence that mass removal appears to occur most rapidly when hot topics (such as deadly Beijing flooding in July 2012) are combined with terms common to sensitive posts, like "government" or "policeman."
- **Tao Zhu et al. 3/4/2013:** [The velocity of censorship: High-fidelity detection of microblog post deletions](#)
- **TOM-Skype sensitive keyword list:** *Businessweek* reported on March 7 about the ongoing efforts of Jeffrey Knockel, a graduate student from New Mexico, to track keyword censorship and surveillance on TOM-Skype, the local Chinese version of the popular international VOIP and chat service now owned by Microsoft. Every few days, Knockel publishes a list of retrieved sensitive keywords. Below is a link to the list from March 21.
- [Keyword list](#)
 - [Jeffrey Knockel](#)
 - **Businessweek 3/8/2013:** [Cracking China's Skype surveillance software](#)
- **Chinese media controls at home and abroad:** On March 11, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) released a special report titled *Challenged in China: The Shifting Dynamics of Censorship and Control*. The report includes chapters on internet activism and censorship (particularly on microblogs), legal threats to journalists, and the spread of self-censorship and internet filtering beyond China's borders.
- **CPJ 3/2013:** [Challenged in China: The shifting dynamics of censorship and control](#)