



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

Issue 94: October 8, 2013

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PHOTO OF THE WEEK: FIGHTING GRAFT WITH KID GLOVES



Credit: [Sina Weibo](#)

BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS



Party's TV 'self-criticism' and militant rhetoric raise specter of Maoism

President Xi Jinping's "mass line" party discipline campaign, first launched in June (see CMB No. [89](#)), has taken on new Maoist overtones thanks to a televised "self-criticism" session and the growing prominence of the term "public opinion struggle" in official rhetoric. On September 25, state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) aired a 24-minute segment about a recent self-criticism session by party officials in Hebei Province. The event was unusual in that such sessions are rarely televised, and because Xi himself presided over the exercise. Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* on September 28 published a chart tracking the various criticisms the officials applied to themselves and others, including not heeding the public's view, overspending on event planning, and being too pushy. Barbara Demick of the *Los Angeles Times* noted that self-criticism sessions have a long history in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and that for those asked to participate, "the trick is to identify a fault that sounds plausible but not too embarrassing." Indeed, no cadre admitted to more egregious but common abuses like embezzlement, bribery, or torture. While the Hebei session left some participants on the brink of tears, according to state media, it was greeted with derision by many netizens. One widely circulated video parody showed two toddlers in a martial arts match who never touch each other despite much punching and kicking. Analyst Zhang Lifan interpreted the CCTV broadcast as part of an effort by Xi to consolidate power ahead of a party plenum in November. The footage also bore a resemblance to recent televised confessions by leading bloggers in connection with a crackdown on internet commentary (see CMB No. [93](#)). Meanwhile, the rise of the term "public opinion struggle" in mainstream party discourse stoked fears of greater repression in the country. The China Media Project in Hong Kong published a series of insightful essays analyzing the emergence of the militant term and its departure from the public opinion "guidance" or "channeling" favored under Xi's predecessors, Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin. For many in China, the term "struggle" (*douzhen*) has especially violent and traumatic connotations, given its association with past CCP political campaigns including the antirightist movement in the 1950s, the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76, and the persecution of Falun Gong in more recent decades.

- *South China Morning Post* 9/28/2013: [Sweating and on the verge of tears: Chinese officials carry out self-criticism on TV](#)
- Xinhua 9/27/2013: [Criticism campaign leading CPC officials to improve style](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 9/26/2013: [Xi Jinping oversees self-criticism sessions in Hebei](#)
- Bloomberg 10/2/2013: [Maoist self-criticism comes to a TV near you](#)
- *Los Angeles Times* 9/26/2013: [Mao-era style of self-criticism reappears on Chinese TV](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 9/28/2013: [Xi Jinping's 'criticism campaign' triggers online parody and sex jokes](#)
- China Media Project 9/24/2013: [Parsing the 'public opinion struggle'](#)
- *Global Times* 8/28/2013: [“舆论斗争”是一个让人不安的字眼 \[Public opinion struggle is a term that makes people uneasy\]](#)



State media announce Bo Xilai verdict in choreographed rollout

On September 22, state media and the Jinan Intermediate People's Court announced that Bo Xilai, the former Chongqing Communist Party chief who was purged from the party leadership in early 2012, had been convicted and sentenced to life in prison for bribery, as well as 15 years for embezzlement and seven years for abuse of power. The announcement came about one month after the conclusion of Bo's trial at the same court in Shandong Province (see CMB No. [92](#)). The following day, CNN reported that Bo had appealed the verdict. The court announced the decision on its Sina Weibo microblog account, alongside a photograph of Bo in handcuffs standing before the three-judge panel. Footage of the hearing was aired by state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) as part of its flagship evening news program. The court's microblog post was quickly shared over 10,000 times, and "Bo Xilai case" became the second most popular search term on Weibo. Minxin Pei, a China scholar at Claremont McKenna College in California, pointed out that the official Xinhua news agency had posted its announcement 40 seconds before the court, reinforcing the widely held belief that the final decision was made by political leaders in Beijing rather than by the judges in Jinan. Few observers were surprised by the guilty verdict, though the life sentence was harsher than many had initially anticipated and longer than the 15- and 18-year sentences handed down in past prosecutions of Politburo members. Some speculated that Bo received extra punishment because of his defiance during the trial. By contrast, state media like Xinhua and the *People's Daily* touted the sentence as an example of justice being served amid President Xi Jinping's anticorruption campaign. According to *China Digital Times*, on September 20, two days before the announcement, the Central Propaganda Department instructed media outlets to use only Xinhua copy when reporting on the verdict and to rein in the Weibo accounts of their employees. A number of netizens voiced their support for Bo, but according to *Foreign Policy's* Isaac Stone Fish, posts by various government entities applauding the verdict were more common. Ahead of the announcement, some netizens initiated bets on the length of Bo's prospective sentence, though such discussions were subsequently deleted by censors.

- Xinhua 9/22/2013: [Bo Xilai sentenced to life in prison for bribery, embezzlement, power abuse](#)
- CCTV 9/22/2013: [薄熙来一审被判处无期徒刑\[Bo Xilai sentenced to life in prison\]](#)
- *China Digital Times* 9/20/2013: [Ministry of Truth: Bo Xilai verdict](#)
- *Guardian* 9/21/2013: [China: Bo Xilai sentenced to life in verdict intended to send a message](#)
- *Foreign Policy* 9/22/2013: [Chinese social media users react to Bo Xilai's sentence](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 9/22/2013: [Bo Xilai's life sentence: the Weibo reaction](#)
- CNN 9/23/2013: [China's Bo Xilai appeals conviction](#)
- *Diplomat* 9/25/2013: [The legacy of Bo Xilai](#)
- Xinhua 9/23/2013: [Bo's case follows basic legal principles: official newspaper](#)
- *People's Daily* 9/22/2013: [人民日报评论员文章:坚持法治反腐建设廉洁政治 \[People's Daily editorial: Safeguard the rule of law to construct corruption-free politics\]](#)



Chinese state media, netizens take mild view of U.S. government shutdown

After a legislative impasse in the U.S. Congress forced a partial shutdown of the federal government on October 1, China's state media and blogosphere provided varying interpretations. On October 2, the official Xinhua news agency published an unflattering article that examined the standoff and found that it showed the "ugly side of partisan politics." Tests by *China Media Bulletin* editors found that searches on state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) made at least 100 related news clips available on its website, including interviews with frustrated Americans and tourists. However, according to the online magazine *Tea Leaf Nation*, the Chinese media coverage was generally neutral and informative, avoiding the typical celebratory tone that often accompanies state outlets' reporting of U.S. government failures. Notably, the Communist Party's often nationalist *Global Times* newspaper refrained from doctrinaire assertions. Meanwhile, more than 135,000 related posts appeared on the microblogging platform Sina Weibo on the first day of the shutdown, and many netizens took a surprisingly positive view. They praised the checks and balances of the American system, noted the lack of disorder in the country despite the federal closures, and compared the powerful U.S. Congress favorably with China's rubber-stamp legislature.

- *Foreign Policy* 10/01/2013: [Chinese netizens on U.S. government shutdown: We want one of our own](#)
- *China Digital Times* 10/02/2013: [U.S. shutdown: The view from China](#)
- *Tea Leaf Nation* 10/03/2013: [China's surprising reaction to the U.S. government shutdown](#)
- Xinhua 10/02/2013: Commentary: [On guard against spillover of irresponsible U.S. politics](#)
- Bloomberg 10/03/2013: [For some Chinese, shutdown makes U.S. look strong](#)
- *Global Times* 10/01/2013: [White House orders shut down of the federal government](#)
- CCTV 10/9/2013: [Search results on U.S. federal government](#)

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Teenage netizen released after outcry amid social-media crackdown

Yang Hui, a 16-year-old victim of China's recent crackdown on "internet rumors," was released on September 23 after a week in custody. Yang was thought to be the youngest and one of the first microbloggers to be detained under a judicial interpretation announced on September 9 that allows users to receive up to three years in prison for posting allegedly harmful information that is viewed more than 5,000 times or reposted more than 500 times (see CMB No. [93](#)). Police in Zhangjiachuan County, Gansu Province, arrested the student after he used his microblog to castigate the local police for their handling of the September 12 death of a karaoke bar manager. He accused the authorities of covering up a murder by quickly deeming the death a suicide, and his postings

prompted a September 14 street protest by hundreds of people at the alleged crime scene. As news of Yang's September 17 detention emerged, more than 40 prominent lawyers signed a petition calling for his release, and netizens began uncovering evidence of corruption among local officials. The Zhangjiachuan County police chief was suspended on September 24, and although no formal explanation was given, the move came after internet users found past court documents accusing him of paying bribes to his former superior from 1995 to 2005. On September 25, state-run *China Daily* quoted analysts who said the local authorities had misused the new judicial guidance in Yang's case, but the interpretation's vague provisions leave law enforcement officials with considerable discretion. In the past two months, hundreds of people have reportedly been questioned or detained as part of the crackdown on social-media activity, ranging from ordinary users like Yang to high-profile bloggers with millions of followers.

- *South China Morning Post* 9/25/2013: [Is a 16-year-old boy's release a victory for netizens in China's internet crackdown?](#)
- *Guardian* 9/24/2013: [Chinese police chief suspended after online storm over teenager's detention](#)
- *China Daily* 9/25/2013: [Police chief suspended after boy released](#)
- NPR 9/25/2013: [New Chinese law cracks down on 'rumor mongers'](#)



Netizens object as street vendor is executed for slaying officials

Xia Junfeng, a laid-off factory worker turned street vendor in Shenyang, Liaoning Province, was executed on September 25 for the May 2009 murder of two urban management personnel (*chengguan*) despite widespread sympathy for his plight among Chinese netizens. According to media reports, Xia had been confronted by the *chengguan* for running a food cart without a license. He maintained that he had stabbed the two in self-defense after being severely beaten himself, and his lawyer, renowned human rights defender Teng Biao, said he had found several witnesses who would support that account. Nevertheless, the Supreme People's Court had upheld Xia's murder conviction and death sentence. Many of his online supporters criticized the country's opaque judiciary system and pointed to the notoriety of *chengguan*, whose brutality has sparked public protests in the past (see CMB Nos. [50](#), [90](#)). On the day of his execution, Xia's name was the most searched keyword on the microblogging platform Sina Weibo. Several comments compared Xia's fate with that of Gu Kailai, the wife of purged Chongqing party chief Bo Xilai, who received a suspended death sentence in August 2012 for her role in the murder of a British businessman. "Gu Kailai also killed a person, right?" wrote one user, adding, "How come she didn't get death sentence? Why death for Xia Junfeng?" According to *China Digital Times*, in a move to silence discussion of Xia's execution on China's National Day on October 1, his name and related terms were censored on Sina Weibo. As his funeral was held on the same day, some netizens dubbed him a "national martyr."

- Associated Press 9/25/2013: [Execution of Xia Junfeng, street vendor convicted of killing city officials, draws criticism of China's uneven justice system](#)
- Global Voices 9/25/2013: [China: Finding light in the darkness on Xia Junfeng's execution day](#)

- *Businessweek* 9/26/2013: [Social media gripped by street vendor's execution](#)
 - *China Digital Times* 10/1/2013: [Sensitive words: Xia Junfeng, National Day](#)
 - *Wall Street Journal* 9/25/2013: [China killers unequal in life and death](#)
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Officials dash hopes of open internet in Shanghai free-trade zone

On September 29, the Chinese government launched the Shanghai Pilot Free Trade Zone, the first free-trade zone (FTZ) on the country's mainland. State media framed the 11-square-mile project as a symbol of the government's commitment to broader economic reforms. However, the Shanghai municipal authorities on September 30 unveiled a list of measures to control foreign investment in the FTZ, particularly in areas where it could undermine state censorship. The rules included a ban on foreign investment in or operation of telecommunications services, television broadcasters, satellite transmission and internet service providers, and internet cafes. The authorities also prohibited foreign companies from investing in online gaming, news websites, and online video and audio streaming platforms, with an exception for music services. The Shanghai FTZ had generated wide discussion among Chinese netizens after Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* reported on September 25 that foreign websites that have long been blocked for mainland users, such as Facebook and Twitter, would be unblocked inside the trade area. Beijing immediately refuted that assertion through the official Xinhua news agency. The *People's Daily* overseas edition also denied the claim in an article entitled "China Will Not Establish Online 'Political Concession,'" insisting that only economic rules would be eased in the FTZ. However, the State Council Information Office soon ordered that the article not be disseminated on websites inside China, suggesting an attempt to send a message to international audiences while not provoking additional debate at home.

- *Diplomat* 9/29/2013: [Shanghai opens free trade zone; internet restrictions remain](#)
 - *Tech in Asia* 9/30/2013: [Shanghai's new free trade zone bans online gaming, internet cafes, and media businesses](#)
 - *Global Times* 9/26/2013: [No special access to banned websites at free trade zone in Shanghai](#)
 - *China Digital Times* 9/27/2013: [Ministry of Truth: No online political concession](#)
 - TechWeb 9/25/2013: [消息称“上海自贸区解禁 Facebook 等”系误传 \[“Facebook unblocked in Shanghai FTZ” news is false\]](#)
 - *South China Morning Post* 9/25/2013: [China to lift ban on Facebook—but only within Shanghai free-trade zone](#)
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'House Sister' sentenced after online corruption exposé

Gong Aiai, a former deputy head of the local state-run bank and a member of the People's Congress in Yulin, Shaanxi Province, was sentenced to three years in prison on September 29 for using forged household registration documents to amass more than 40 Beijing properties worth an estimated

\$160 million (see CMB No. [80](#)). As with many similar cases in China, her alleged activities were first exposed by online whistle-blowers in January, and angry netizens quickly dubbed her “House Sister.” Under China’s *hukou* (household registration) system, one must possess an urban or household registration document to purchase properties within a given city. Gong, who allegedly paid 300,000 yuan (\$49,000) for the false Beijing residency papers, argued in court that she was unaware of the illegality of possessing multiple hukou documents. She had faced a maximum possible sentence of 10 years in prison. Gong’s case struck a nerve in a country where the poor and middle class often cannot afford to buy a home in cities, and where an urban hukou, essential to secure health care and public education, is routinely denied to migrant workers and their families. While the verdict represented a victory of sorts for online anticorruption campaigners, many whistle-blowers have been detained or questioned for their work in recent months as the authorities simultaneously crack down on independent internet activism and commentary and promote state- and party-led antigraft efforts (see CMB No. [93](#)).

- *South China Morning Post* 9/30/2013: [Former bank chief who amassed dozens of properties jailed for three years over fake IDs](#)
- *Xinhua* 9/24/2013: [‘House sister’ denies charge of faking ID](#)
- *Financial Times* 9/29/2013: [Jail sentence for China’s ‘house sister’](#)
- *New York Times* 9/29/2013: [China sends a real estate mogul to prison](#)
- *Guardian* 9/5/2013: [China’s ‘Brother Wristwatch’ Yang Dacai jailed for 14 years for corruption](#)



Apple removes circumvention tool as state reins in mobile news apps

In a further attempt to control “online rumors” and other unapproved and supposedly harmful content, the State Internet Information Office (SIIO) announced on September 30 that it was pressing news applications for mobile devices to “rectify” their practices or face closure. The statement singled out Chinese apps such as Zaker and MoBee, adding that some carried “false information” and failed to comply with state regulations governing news providers. A number of mobile news apps offer access to foreign media outlets that are otherwise blocked in China. On October 1, Radio Netherlands Worldwide reported that California-based technology giant Apple had quietly removed the circumvention tool OpenDoor, which enables users to access blocked content, from its online China App Store on July 11. The app had been downloaded about 2,000 times per day in China, which accounted for almost one third of its 800,000 total downloads worldwide. Demands by the developers for an explanation from Apple remained unanswered until August 28, at which point Apple stated that OpenDoor “includes content that is illegal in China.” Apple has offered similar reasons in the past when removing apps that draw objections from the Chinese Communist Party, including a bookstore app carrying Tibet- and Xinjiang-related books, as well as the mobile app for New York-based New Tang Dynasty Television (NTDTV), a station established by adherents of the banned Falun Gong spiritual movement that frequently reports on the Chinese government’s human rights abuses, among other sensitive topics (see CMB Nos. [65](#), [86](#)).

- Xinhua 10/8/2013: [國信辦查處一批違規移動新聞客戶端 \[State Internet Information Office found illegal mobile news applications\]](#)
 - Radio Netherlands Worldwide 10/1/2013: [Apple kowtows to China's censors; removes circumvention app](#)
 - BBC 10/3/2013: [Anger as Apple axes China anti-firewall app](#)
 - CNN 10/4/2013: [Apple slammed in China for pulling firewall-busting app OpenDoor](#)
 - Reuters 09/30/2013: [China threatens closure of mobile news apps amid internet crackdown](#)
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BEYOND CHINA



AMC owner Wanda Group plans massive film studio in China

On September 22, Chinese theater owner Dalian Wanda Group announced a 50 billion yuan (\$8.3 billion) investment plan for a film and television production complex—to be called the Oriental Movie Metropolis—in Qingdao, China. At the unveiling ceremony, which was attended by Hollywood movie stars such as Leonardo DiCaprio and Nicole Kidman, the company said it hoped to turn China into a culture-industry powerhouse. The planned complex, which is scheduled to be completed in 2017, will include the world's largest studio, the world's only permanent underwater studio, and a film museum, among other facilities. Wanda said it had reached a tentative deal to produce 30 foreign movies and a hundred domestic films and television shows at the complex each year. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, the company will also collaborate with the U.S. Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to hold an annual film festival at the site starting in 2016. Wanda made international headlines in May 2012 when it announced its takeover of AMC Entertainment, North America's second-largest theater chain (see CMB No. [59](#)). Given China's opaque censorship and quotas on imported movies, foreign filmmakers have complained about the difficulties of doing business in the country (see CMB No. [87](#)). However, in an interview with Xinhua on September 24, Wanda owner Wang Jianlin said he had picked Qingdao for his studio complex because of generous support from the local government. He advised colleagues to work closely with officials, saying, "Anyone in the film industry should know that the earlier you cooperate with China, the earlier you receive benefits."

- *Forbes* 9/22/2013: [China's richest man makes \\$8 billion statement of ambition for global film clout](#)
 - *Los Angeles Times* 9/24/2013: [Wang Jianlin's film studio plan in China has a Hollywood following](#)
 - *South China Morning Post* 9/23/2013: [Wanda billionaire brings Hollywood to Qingdao](#)
 - Xinhua 9/24/2013: [萬達集團發力文化產業王健林：要做就做第一 \[Wang Jianlin on Wanda Group cultural industry: Be number one!\]](#)
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Prominent Japan-based Chinese scholar detained, editor missing

Zhu Jianrong, a Chinese political commentator and a professor at Tokyo's Toyo Gakuen University, was detained by Chinese state security officers at an airport in Shanghai on July 17. According to Hong Kong's *Ming Pao* newspaper, Zhu had included previously undisclosed information about the Chinese military in his recent publications in Japan, which led to official investigations on whether he had conducted research through illegal channels. China's state media had been silent on his disappearance, but a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said in a daily briefing on September 11 that Chinese nationals like Zhu must follow the country's law, all but confirming that he was in official custody. Meanwhile, the *Japan Times* published an editorial on September 29 that called for his release and urged the Japanese government to pressure Beijing to at least allow Zhu's family to meet with him. According to the article, the news of Zhu's detention "sent shock waves among Chinese researchers and journalists in Japan." He had regularly engaged in public efforts to improve Sino-Japanese relations. In another possible sign that the Chinese government is extending its current ideological discipline campaign to the expatriate community, the *Japan Times* also reported that Su Ling, the chief editor of *Xinhua Shibao*, a Chinese-language newspaper published in Japan, had been missing since he flew to China in May.

- *Japan Times* 9/29/2013: [Worries over fate of Japan hands](#)
- *Ming Pao* 9/12/2013: [旅日學者涉泄密受查 \[Japan-based scholar summoned for allegedly breaching information\]](#)
- *Asahi Shimbun* 9/13/2013: [Beijing questioning detained Chinese scholar based in Japan](#)

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

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

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