



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

Issue 96: November 12, 2013

Headlines

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PHOTO OF THE WEEK: BLOOMBERG NEWS ON ITS KNEES



Credit: [NMA World Edition](#)

BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS



News outlets hype vague reform plans during closed party plenum

From November 9 to 12, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee chosen one year ago held its third plenum. The closed meeting in Beijing was attended by hundreds of the party's top officials. Historically, third plenum meetings under a new leadership have been important moments signaling future policy directions and potential reforms. Most dramatically, the 1978 plenum led by Deng Xiaoping marked the beginning of China's economic transformation following the death of Mao Zedong. Although they lacked concrete details of the meeting's agenda, CCP-run media and other outlets ran various commentaries and supplements before and during the conclave, touting the need for some reform, mostly in the economic and social spheres. On November 10, the CCP mouthpiece *People's Daily* ran a front-page editorial implying that any reforms would be an uphill battle, prompting conflicting interpretations by foreign media. The relatively liberal and commercialized *Beijing News*, meanwhile, published a 96-page report titled "Reform: Setting Off Again." Its cover showed a ship navigating dangerous waters, and it listed 12 areas where reforms need to "crash through a barrier," including "land transfers," "social welfare," and "household registration." The CCP leadership has made clear that changes to the political system are neither under consideration nor open to debate, but the *Beijing News* obliquely cited the need for "administrative" changes to decentralize power and urged a loosening of restrictions on "social organizations," an apparent reference to civil society. The first statement released after the conclusion of the plenum on November 12 did little to clarify what decisions had been made. Several economic experts complained of its vague language and mixed signals, as it declared that markets will play a "decisive" role while also acknowledging the importance of state-owned enterprises and the CCP's leadership. In what has become a routine byproduct of high-level party meetings, petitioners and activists suffered tighter restrictions surrounding the plenum (see CMB No. [82](#)). Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* reported on November 7 that "police and local governments across the mainland have been rounding up petitioners, keeping activists under close watch, and warning rights lawyers to keep a low profile."

- *Wall Street Journal* 11/10/2013: [Reformers stagger out of gate in Beijing](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 11/10/2013: [Chinese media build expectations of reforms at key meeting](#)
- *New York Times* 11/8/2013: [Reform, ahoy? A newspaper heralds new horizons for the Chinese ship of state](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 11/8/2013: [Petitioners 'living in fear' as police crack down ahead of third plenum](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 11/12/2013: [China endorses 'decisive' role for markets as plenum concludes](#)
- *People's Daily* 11/10/2013: [那么一股子劲不能松 \[Keep up the spirit\]](#)



State media limit reporting, commentary on Tiananmen explosion

The Chinese government made an orchestrated effort to control reporting on a car crash and explosion on Beijing's Tiananmen Square that killed five people and injured 38 others on October 28. Though the incident took place in the country's most symbolic public space, state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) did not initially mention it, and the U.S.-based Cable News Network (CNN) was reportedly blacked out in China when it ran footage of the aftermath. Several Chinese newspapers noted the incident by reposting a brief statement published by the official Xinhua news agency. According to Xinhua, a jeep carrying three people had crashed into a crowd of pedestrians before it burst into flames. The relatively liberal Guangdong-based *Southern Metropolis Daily* released an interview with a Filipino student who was injured by the car. However, along with hundreds of online postings on the topic, it was quickly removed from the internet. After two days of silence, on October 30, Xinhua offered an update on the investigation, claiming that the incident was a well-planned act of terrorism by Uighur Islamic extremists (see CMB No. [95](#)). Commentaries on the CNN website raised doubts about the official account, with one suggesting that the alleged attack could have been "a hastily assembled cry of desperation from a people on the extreme margins of the Chinese state's monstrous development machine." Other foreign media and human rights groups similarly urged caution in drawing conclusions from official information. State media soon began heavily criticizing Americans and CNN in particular. "CNN is way out of line this time," said the Communist Party's *Global Times* newspaper. CCTV alleged that CNN had an ulterior motive and was attempting to justify terrorist crimes. An online petition urging the Chinese government to expel CNN from the country reportedly collected over 140,000 signatures. Ilham Tohti, a prominent Uighur professor at Beijing Central Nationalities University and founder of the minority rights website Uyghur Online, said he had been increasingly harassed by the police as he spoke to foreign reporters about the Tiananmen incident. When Tohti confronted security agents who had rear-ended his car on November 2, indicating that his two small children could have been hurt, the men reportedly said, "We don't care," and repeatedly threatened to kill his whole family. On November 6, another explosion took place near a government building in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, killing one person and injuring eight. For unknown reasons, online censors appeared to let users speculate freely on that incident.

- CNN 10/30/2013: [China censors pounce as Tiananmen Square jeep deaths investigated](#)
- *Washington Post* 10/28/2013: [China censors news of an SUV plowing into a crowd in Tiananmen Square, killing five](#)
- *Washington Post* 11/8/2013: [Why 140,000 Chinese people want to kick out CNN](#)
- BBC 11/4/2013: [China media: Tiananmen Square crash](#)
- CNN 10/31/2013: [Tiananmen crash: Terrorism or cry of desperation?](#)
- Freedom House 11/4/2013: [Be skeptical of the official story on the Tiananmen car crash](#)
- *New York Times* 11/4/2013: [Uighur scholar in ugly confrontation with security agents](#)
- *Global Times* 11/4/2013: [社评：CNN表现了部分美国人的阴暗心理 \[Editorial: CNN shows the dark mentality of most American people\]](#)

- *Tea Leaf Nation* 11/7/2013: [Why isn't China censoring chatter about its latest bomb attack?](#)
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Chinese journalist wins Transparency International prize

On November 8, the Berlin-based anticorruption organization Transparency International (TI) issued an Integrity Award to Chinese investigative journalist Luo Changping. An Angolan journalist also received an Integrity Award for 2013. Luo, a deputy editor at the liberal *Caijing* newsmagazine, is the first Chinese citizen to receive the prize, which celebrates extraordinary antigraft activism. Risking his personal safety and career, he had used his microblog account to publish detailed allegations of financial and personal wrongdoing by Liu Tienan, a former vice chairman of China's powerful economic planning agency (see CMB No. [87](#)). *Caijing* itself had reportedly been reluctant to identify Liu by name. The official was eventually expelled from the Communist Party in August, after the authorities launched an investigation based on the reporter's exposé. However, Luo's microblog account was reportedly shuttered to prevent him from releasing further information. In an interview with Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* published on November 8, Luo advised his fellow Chinese investigative reporters not to use their real names for safety reasons, though he acknowledged that maintaining a certain visibility can be a means of self-protection. In keeping with the government's broader efforts to suppress independent anticorruption activity (see CMB Nos. [92](#), [93](#)), the Central Propaganda Department reportedly issued a directive on November 2 that instructed all media outlets in China to avoid reporting or commenting on TI's plans to grant Luo its prestigious award.

- *South China Morning Post* 11/8/2013: [Award-winning journalist Luo Changping on the state of Chinese media](#)
 - Transparency International 11/8/2013: [Luo Changping: Journalist—China](#)
 - *China Digital Times* 11/5/2013: [Minitrue: Luo Changping may win integrity award](#)
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NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Tencent seeks U.S. app stake as Chinese competition heats up

The Chinese social-media giant Tencent has reportedly submitted a bid to purchase \$200 million worth of shares in Snapchat, a popular California-based messaging application. Tencent is attempting to expand the overseas presence of its WeChat messaging app, which already has about 100 million users outside China, and the involvement with Snapchat was seen as a means of learning more about the coveted U.S. market. In China, where it has about 350 million users, WeChat is facing new competition from Laiwang, a similar app launched by Alibaba, another internet giant best

known for its e-commerce sites. Tencent was accused of obstructing a November 1 promotional campaign by Laiwang, with thousands of WeChat users reporting that Tencent's security software was blocking their attempts to join the rival service. Chinese internet firms have often accused one another of unfair, anticompetitive practices (see CMB No. [73](#)). Meanwhile, many popular foreign services, such as Facebook and Twitter, continue to be blocked in China due to their noncompliance with official censorship rules. News of Twitter's successful stock offering on November 7 sparked a wide range of comments on Sina Weibo, a popular Chinese microblogging platform. Many netizens, responding to the news with satire, wondered how a "nonexistent" website could go public and raise \$24 billion from investors.

- *Diplomat* 11/7/2013: [China's Tencent woos Silicon Valley with Snapchat bid](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 11/8/2013: [Frustrated Chinese bloggers greet Twitter's successful IPO with satire](#)
- *Tech in Asia* 11/1/2013: [More chat app silliness: Tencent allegedly blocks invites to Laiwang on rival app WeChat](#)

HONG KONG



Ballet alterations raise censorship concerns

The publicly funded Hong Kong Ballet recently came under fire after it allegedly censored part of the *Dream of the Red Chamber*, a coproduction with Germany's Ballet Dortmund. According to Global Voices, before the October 25 premiere at the city's Cultural Centre, the Hong Kong Ballet removed a scene that depicted paramilitary Red Guards destroying "old China" objects during the traumatic Cultural Revolution period. For some performances, the group also altered a 12-minute projection that showed different stages of Chinese history by taking out a scene of Red Guards waving copies of the "little red book"—a compilation of quotes by Chinese Communist Party founder Mao Zedong. Hong Kong Ballet claimed that the decisions were made for technical reasons, adding that it had consent from Ballet Dortmund's artistic director Wang Xin Peng, who had choreographed the show. However, Wang told *Ming Pao* newspaper that he was not aware of the changes until the day after the premiere, which was attended by Zhang Xiaoming, the head of Beijing's Hong Kong Liaison Office. On November 8, the home affairs committee of Hong Kong's Legislative Council (Legco) decided to invite—but not require—the ballet group to explain at a regular session in December whether it had encountered political pressure from the central government. Foreign performers have encountered difficulties in Hong Kong before. In 2010, partly due to the troupe's portrayals of Beijing's persecution of Falun Gong members, the technical staff of the U.S.-based Shen Yun Performing Arts company were denied visas to enter Hong Kong for scheduled shows, forcing their cancellation.

- *South China Morning Post* 11/9/2013: [No special Legco inquiry into Hong Kong Ballet 'censorship' row](#)

- Global Voices 10/31/2013: [Ballett Dortmund's red dream ballet censored in Hong Kong](#)
 - *Ming Pao* 11/3/2013: [王新鹏：没有同意删戏《红》剧原创者反驳港芭说法 \[Wang Xin Peng: Did not agree to alter red show; choreographer refutes Hong Kong ballet claim\]](#)
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BEYOND CHINA



Bloomberg halts articles on Chinese leadership, self-censorship alleged

The *New York Times* reported on November 8 that editors at Bloomberg News had recently blocked publication of an investigative report on the financial ties between a wealthy tycoon and the families of top Chinese leaders, as well as an article on foreign banks' hiring of the children of Chinese leaders, known as "princelings." Bloomberg editor in chief Matthew Winkler reportedly made the decision to halt the first article after it had already been reviewed and approved by Bloomberg's lawyers and editors. According to the *Times*, Winkler explained in an internal conference call with the journalists on October 29 that Bloomberg could run the risk of being "kicked out of China." He also reportedly compared the company's situation to that of foreign media outlets operating in Nazi Germany, which were forced to self-censor in order to remain in the country. Winkler later denied that the two stories had been permanently spiked, but did not publicly discuss the conference call. The incidents were first disclosed on November 7 in an animated video produced by Hong Kong's Next Media, whose news outlets are often critical of the Chinese Communist Party. The Bloomberg News website has been blocked in China since it published a series of reports in 2012 on the wealth and financial ties of top Chinese leaders and their families (see CMB No. [63](#)). Chinese officials also reportedly ordered some Chinese companies not to subscribe to Bloomberg's financial news terminal service, the company's main business. According to an October 22 report by Freedom House analyst Sarah Cook, many international media outlets have faced repercussions for publishing stories that the Chinese authorities consider sensitive. In addition to the website blocking, their journalists are often unable to renew residency visas (see below), and their computer systems have been subject to cyberattacks and infiltration (see CMB No. [80](#)).

- *Quartz* 11/11/2013: [Is Bloomberg killing investigative stories to stay in China?](#)
 - *Financial Times* 11/10/2013: [Bloomberg quashes report to stay in China](#)
 - *New York Times* 11/8/2013: [Bloomberg news is said to curb articles that might anger China](#)
 - NMA World Edition 11/7/2013: [Bloomberg News curtails investigative reporting in China, sources tell NMA](#)
 - *South China Morning Post* 11/10/2013: [Bloomberg news service censoring stories about China, journalists claim](#)
 - Sarah Cook 10/22/2013: [The long shadow of Chinese censorship](#)
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Reuters journalist denied visa to reenter China

In its latest move to restrict foreign media outlets (see above), the Chinese government on November 8 denied the visa application of Paul Mooney, a prominent journalist known for his award-winning writing about human rights issues in China. According to his employer, the U.S.-based Thomson Reuters news agency, China's Foreign Ministry did not explain its decision, which came after an eight-month delay. Mooney had last left China in September 2012 after his former employer, Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post*, decided not to renew his contract for what he said were political reasons (see CMB No. [63](#)). Mooney was called in for an interview by the Chinese consulate in San Francisco after he submitted the visa application. He said he was asked about his stance on the Tibet issue, Western media bias, and exiled Chinese legal activist Chen Guangcheng, with whom he had briefly worked on a book project that was called off in April. The consular officers reportedly told him, "If we give you a visa, we hope you'll be more balanced with your coverage." Mooney did not blame Reuters for its inability to secure his visa, conceding that no international news organization was currently in a position to exert significant pressure on Beijing, given its economic clout. Other foreign media outlets have also reported difficulty in obtaining visas for their journalists. Bloomberg and the *New York Times* have not had any new resident journalist visas approved since 2012, when they published reports on the family wealth of top Chinese leaders and had their websites blocked by Chinese censors.

- *New York Times* 11/9/2013: [Reporter for Reuters won't receive China visa](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 11/10/2013: [In latest press restriction, China denies visa to U.S. reporter](#)
- *Apple Daily* 11/10/2013: [疑報導西藏人權問題 美記者遭拒發陸簽證 \[China denies visa to U.S. journalist reportedly for report on Tibetan human rights issues\]](#)



Taiwanese singer's flag display sparks Chinese netizen backlash

After popular Taiwanese musician Deserts Chang displayed the flag of the Republic of China (ROC) on stage at a November 2 concert in Manchester, England, her scheduled concert tour in China was canceled. During her performance at the University of Manchester, attended mostly by Taiwanese and Chinese students, Chang had held up a flag brought by a group of fans sitting in the front row, and said she had "not felt so patriotic for a while." An audience member then shouted, "There are students from mainland here. No politics today!" Chang denied that her gesture was a political act and said she welcomed different opinions. The show concluded without further disruptions, but many fans turned to the Chinese microblogging platform Sina Weibo to criticize Chang for "declaring Taiwan's independence." The ROC flag was used in China before the Communist Party took power in 1949, and it remains in use in democratic Taiwan. Although the banner is not associated with the movement to declare Taiwan's formal independence, it is a reminder that the island remains outside Beijing's control. Popular Taiwanese singers and actors typically refrain from discussing political topics that the Chinese Communist Party considers sensitive, as they seek to gain exposure in the Chinese market. Despite the heated debate on the internet, Chinese state media

remained unusually silent on the Chang incident. On November 5, in response to the reported cancellation of her December concert in Beijing, Chang said on her Facebook account that she was willing to accept the losses and end the controversy, writing, “I am not singing to make money and harm people at the same time.”

- *Wen Wei Po* 11/8/2013: [青天白日旗致張懸大陸演唱會取消 \[Deserts Chang’s concert tour in China canceled due to ROC flag\]](#)
- *Diplomat* 11/8/2013: [Taiwanese singer-songwriter draws criticism over flag display](#)
- *BBC* 11/8/2013: [Taiwan singer’s flag display sparks row](#)
- *Telegraph* 11/7/2013: [Taiwan singer upsets China with flag stunt](#)



Unable to leave China, Ai Weiwei continues international artistic engagement

Dissident Chinese artist and blogger Ai Weiwei has remained active on the international art scene despite his government-imposed travel ban (see CMB No. [69](#)). In an interview with Agence France-Presse published on November 5, Ai said his passport was still being held by the Chinese authorities, which prevented him from attending the Stockholm Film Festival in Sweden. Organizers of the festival, which was scheduled to run from November 5 to 17, had invited him to join its jury panel. To protest his forced absence, Ai sent a wooden chair to the venue with a special bar that would prevent anyone from sitting in it, recalling the empty chair of jailed democracy advocate Liu Xiaobo, who was unable to attend the award ceremony for his 2010 Nobel Peace Prize (see CMB No. [3](#)). In a prerecorded video played at the festival’s opening news conference on November 5, Ai said, “I hope it can give some kind of statement on the way authorities can limit freedom of speech, can limit basic human rights for artists to travel or participate in cultural activities—very ruthlessly and with no explanation.” He added, “I’m still living under a kind of soft detention.” On the same day, he was absent from a show in Hong Kong’s Central district that he had curated, featuring the work of 13 local artists. Ai was detained without charge in April 2011 and held for 81 days in an apparent punishment for his outspoken criticism of the Communist Party. He was later hit with a massive tax penalty and remains under close government surveillance (see CMB No. [73](#)).

- *AFP* 11/6/2013: [Ai Weiwei sends defiant message to China at Sweden film fest](#)
- *Hollywood Reporter* 11/6/2013: [Ai Weiwei sends empty chair to Stockholm Film Fest in protest](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 11/8/2013: [Ai Weiwei ‘frames’ Hong Kong artists](#)

NOTABLE ANALYSIS



U.S. scholar delves into practices of Confucius Institutes

On October 29, the *Nation* published a lengthy article, titled “China U.,” about China’s global network of state-sponsored educational programs, known as Confucius Institutes. The author, retired University of Chicago anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, adeptly reviews a series of incidents in recent years that have raised concerns about the impact that the institutes—embedded within American and Canadian universities, among others—have had on academic inquiry and hiring practices. Drawing on numerous interviews and a thorough analysis of relevant documents, Sahlins especially highlights the lack of transparency—and at times deliberate subterfuge—surrounding aspects of the Confucius Institutes’ contracts and operations.

- *Nation* 10/29/2013: [China U.](#)

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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