



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

Issue 97: December 4, 2013

Headlines

-  Fired CCTV producer denounces station's practices
-  Despite reported self-censorship, Bloomberg stays in Beijing's doghouse
-  Censors limit coverage of Qingdao pipeline blast
-  Netizens wary of plans for new national security committee
-  Zimbabwe's ruling party sends team to China for media cooperation

PHOTO OF THE WEEK: FOUR-LETTER WORDS



BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS



Fired CCTV producer denounces station's practices

Wang Qinglei, a producer who had been with state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) for 10 years, was forced to resign on November 27 after he questioned the station's journalistic ethics. In a December 1 microblog posting, Wang confirmed his departure and criticized CCTV for aiding the government's aggressive campaign to rein in influential bloggers, including Chinese-American businessman Charles Xue, whose jailhouse "confession" was aired by the station in September (see CMB No. [93](#)). Wang said the broadcaster essentially served as an accomplice by helping the authorities punish individuals without legal basis. "The news media is not a court," he wrote. He also lashed out at CCTV for running "embarrassing" and unprofessional reports against the U.S.-based coffee retailer Starbucks (see CMB No. [95](#)), among other topics. Wang said his views were shared by many of his colleagues at the station, but managers used actions like his firing to keep them in line. Wang's open letter was shared 30,000 times within hours before it was removed by the microblogging platform Sina Weibo. News articles that had mentioned his resignation were also censored on popular web portals. Though it receives strong government support and funding, viewership of CCTV's news programming has declined in recent years, especially among internet users. A recent survey by popular Chinese web portal Netease showed that 60 percent of respondents do not watch CCTV's flagship evening news program. A Weibo post on the results by the international web portal Kdnet was quickly deleted.

- *South China Morning Post* 12/2/2013: [Dismissed CCTV producer Wang Qinglei slams censorship](#)
- Reuters 12/2/2013: [China journalist slams state TV for airing public confession](#)
- Deutsche Welle 12/2/2013: [央视制片人王青雷离职，“真话”遭封杀 \[CCTV producer Wang Qinglei forced to quit for speaking truth\]](#)
- China Media Project 11/13/2013: [Who watches CCTV Nightly News?](#)



Despite reported self-censorship, Bloomberg stays in Beijing's doghouse

Bloomberg News has continued to face scrutiny from Chinese authorities since reports surfaced in early November that its editor in chief, Matthew Winkler, had blocked a 2,500-word investigative report on the financial ties between a Chinese billionaire and the families of senior government officials. In an exclusive report published on December 2, the U.S.-based *Fortune* magazine said that several Chinese officials paid unannounced visits to Bloomberg News bureaus in Beijing and Shanghai in late November. Details of the "inspections" remained unclear, but at least one of the officials allegedly asked for an apology for Winkler's reported assertion that Bloomberg had to self-censor to remain in China just as other foreign outlets did in Nazi Germany (see CMB No. [96](#)). Rob Hutton, a Bloomberg reporter who had flown to China to cover British prime minister David Cameron's official visit, was barred from a December 2 press event held by Cameron and Chinese premier Li Keqiang. According to the *Financial Times*, Bloomberg has generally been excluded from official Chinese press conferences since it published a series of articles in 2012 on the family wealth of top government officials, despite the fact that those and some other Bloomberg articles were

branded with the company's "Code 204" designation, which prevents them from appearing on its financial terminals in China. Meanwhile, the websites of Bloomberg News and the *New York Times* continue to be blocked in China. On November 13, the *Times*' affiliated lifestyle publication *T Magazine* was briefly blocked after the newspaper exposed business links between U.S. financial firm JP Morgan Chase and Wen Ruchun, daughter of former Chinese premier Wen Jiabao. The Chinese-language websites of Reuters and the *Wall Street Journal*, which had published similar stories, were also blocked and remain inaccessible.

- CNN Money 12/2/2013: [Exclusive: Chinese authorities conduct unannounced 'inspections' of Bloomberg News bureaus](#)
- *Financial Times* 12/2/2013: [UK protests after China bars Bloomberg reporter from press event](#)
- Reporters Without Borders 11/15/2013: [China blocks Reuters and Wall Street Journal sites](#)
- *Tea Leaf Nation* 11/13/2013: [Did the New York Times just get blocked in China—again?](#)
- *China Digital Times* 12/2/2013: [Discussion of Wen's daughter censored](#)
- *New York Times* 11/28/2013: [Bloomberg code keeps articles from Chinese eyes](#)
- Next Media 11/18/2013: [Bloomberg News suspends reporter Michael Forsythe over alleged leaks \(video\)](#)



Censors limit coverage of Qingdao pipeline blast

Chinese authorities have sought to restrict media coverage of a deadly oil pipeline explosion on November 22 in the coastal city of Qingdao that killed over 50 people and injured scores more. The explosion came seven hours after a leak was discovered, and the large number of casualties raised questions as to whether the authorities adequately warned or evacuated local residents. A leaked November 24 directive from the Central Propaganda Department strictly prohibited media from dispatching reporters to the site of the disaster, discussing the possible cause and responsible parties, or publishing summaries of past accidents. While some Beijing media were more critical of the local government's emergency response, Qingdao's own media either chose to remain silent the day after the accident or praised officials for visiting the victims. After President Xi Jinping's visit on November 24, local newspapers were filled with positive coverage of blood donations and the provision of food and medical care. Meanwhile, some residents continued to protest five days after the blast, asking to be relocated. Qingdao party secretary Li Qun reportedly said at a November 27 meeting near the scene of the accident that the government should "strike hard against criminal behavior" and "scour the land investigating people to find lawbreakers deceiving others with rumors." Netizens criticized the remarks, saying he was putting political interests above public safety.

- *Offbeat China* 11/27/2013: [Qingdao media's reporting on oil pipeline blast draws criticism](#)
- *New York Times* 11/25/2013: [Evacuation questions after China pipe blast](#)
- *China Digital Times* 12/2/2013: [Li Qun: Maintain stability after Qingdao explosion](#)

- *China Digital Times* 11/25/2013: [Minitrue: Qingdao oil pipeline explosion](#)
 - *Wall Street Journal* 11/25/2013: [Xi Jinping: Zero-tolerance over pipeline violations](#)
-



Chinese media assess departing U.S. ambassador Locke

On November 20, after Gary Locke announced his resignation as U.S. ambassador to China to rejoin his family in the United States, several Chinese media outlets published articles on the departure of the first Chinese American to hold the position, in many cases praising him for his humble demeanor. Locke had attained high popularity among ordinary Chinese since he began his stint in Beijing in August 2011 (see CMB Nos. [34](#), [40](#)). The *Beijing News* on November 21 ran a full-page report about Locke, which included a famous photo of him carrying a backpack and buying his own coffee. “Although some people have criticized Gary Locke for putting on a ‘show,’ a lot of Chinese people still like him,” the article says. On the same day, an editorial in the Communist Party’s *Global Times*, which is usually critical of foreign officials and had previously rebuked local journalists for “romanticizing” the envoy, also acknowledged his performance and said it “shouldn’t be given a low mark.” The Chinese authorities did not heavily censor newspaper mentions of political dramas that took place during Locke’s tenure. Incidents such as former Chongqing police chief Wang Lijun’s “defection” to the U.S. consulate in Chengdu and the U.S. embassy’s protection of blind legal activist Chen Guangcheng were broadly included in the coverage, though Locke’s controversial October 2012 visit to Tibet was not mentioned (see CMB No. [74](#)). As print media focused on Locke’s legacy, Chinese netizens expressed more interest in the reason for his departure. “The haze in Beijing is so bad that Gary Locke couldn’t take it anymore,” one user suggested on the Sina Weibo microblogging platform.

- *BBC* 11/21/2013: [China media: US ambassador Gary Locke’s legacy](#)
 - *South China Morning Post* 11/21/2013: [Gary Locke receives kind parting words from old foe Global Times](#)
 - *Global Times* 11/21/2013: [Locke controversy stems from Chinese expectation](#)
 - *Wall Street Journal* 11/20/2013: [China’s internet users bid adieu to U.S. ambassador Gary Locke](#)
-



Liu Xia letter reaches foreign media, Liu Xiaobo seeks retrial

A July letter from Liu Xia, the wife of imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate and democracy advocate Liu Xiaobo, was published by the *New York Times* on November 29. Although the letter was addressed to a friend, its release represented a rare personal communication with the outside world for a woman who has been under extralegal house arrest since her husband won the Nobel in 2010 (see CMB Nos. [76](#), [86](#)). She writes in the missive of extreme isolation and depression, but says she finds solace in voracious reading, specifically citing a history of the Soviet gulag. Separately, Liu Xiaobo’s lawyer, Mo Shaoping, told Radio Free Asia on November 18 that his client had agreed to file a new appeal of his 2009 conviction and 11-year prison sentence for “incitement to subvert state power.” Prison officials have denied Liu access to his legal team, but he reportedly agreed to the appeal during an October visit by his wife. Mo said his family members had been hesitant to seek a

retrial before because Liu Xia's brother Liu Hui was facing his own trial, and they did not want to anger the authorities. However, Liu Hui was sentenced to 11 years in prison for fraud in June (see CMB No. [88](#)), and the judgment was upheld after an appeal in August. Mo said Liu Xiaobo's new appeal would be a test of the Communist Party's commitment to legal reforms announced after a Central Committee plenum held in mid-November (see below, CMB No. [96](#)). The leadership said in a reform blueprint released on November 15 that the country's judicial and prosecutorial powers would be exercised independently and fairly in accordance with the rule of law. However, legal experts have warned that the vague proposals are unlikely to end political control over the courts, particularly in high-profile cases, and that Liu had already exhausted his opportunities for appeal.

- *New York Times* 11/29/2013: [Isolation under house arrest for wife of imprisoned Nobel laureate](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 11/19/2013: [Jailed Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo to seek retrial](#)
- Radio Free Asia 11/18/2013: [Jailed Chinese Nobel winner Liu Xiaobo to appeal sentence](#)
- *Guardian* 12/2/2013: [Liu Xiaobo's wife possibly suffering from depression under house arrest](#)

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Netizens wary of plans for new national security committee

The official Xinhua news agency announced on November 12 that the Chinese government would establish a “national security committee” (*guo wei hui*) to oversee both foreign and domestic security challenges, provoking fears among internet users that further efforts to stamp out dissent and free expression would ensue. The decision was announced on the last day of the third plenum held by the current Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee, a closed-door meeting attended by top party officials (see CMB No. [96](#)). On November 15, CCP leader Xi Jinping unveiled a comprehensive reform blueprint from the conference. In addition to touting an array of economic and social reform plans, he specifically noted that the new committee would improve China's security strategy amid “double pressure” from within and beyond its borders. While foreign press reports drew comparisons to the U.S. National Security Council, a relatively small body designed to coordinate diplomatic and security policy under the president, many Chinese commentators pointed instead to the Soviet Union's Committee for State Security (KGB), a sprawling and powerful agency with a variety of police, paramilitary, and intelligence duties. It remained unclear when the new committee would be established. Adding to users' concerns, the reform blueprint noted that the internet posed a complex challenge, specifically naming popular mobile-phone messaging applications—Tencent's WeChat and Sina's Weike—as “problematic” examples of platforms that can influence public opinion. The document's omission of the popular microblogging platform Sina Weibo, which has stepped up censorship enforcement (see below), suggested that the government has shifted its focus to newer mobile messaging apps.

- *Wall Street Journal* 11/15/2013: [China wants to control internet even more](#)

- *South China Morning Post* 11/16/2013: [Chinese fear a new KGB as Beijing sets up powerful national security body](#)
- Radio Free Asia 11/12/2013: [New Chinese agency to 'manage' social unrest](#)
- Reuters 11/12/2013: [China to revamp security in face of threats at home, abroad](#)
- Xinhua 11/12/2013: [快讯：中国将建立国家安全委员会 \[Breaking News: China to establish state security committee\]](#)
- Xinhua 11/15/2013: [习近平关于全面深化改革若干重大问题的决定的说明 \[Xi Jinping explains important decisions on comprehensive reforms\]](#)
- Xinhua 11/15/2013: [中共中央关于全面深化改革若干重大问题的决定 \[CCP Central Committee on comprehensive reforms\]](#)
- China Media Project 11/18/2013: [What are Xi's plans for China's media?](#)



Japan phone app censors users in China, Skype said to reduce censorship

The Citizen Lab, an internet security research group in Toronto, reported on November 14 that Line, a Japan-based mobile messaging application that boasts over 300 million users worldwide, has been censoring chats among users in China, blocking transmission of words deemed sensitive by the Chinese government. Seth Hardy, a senior researcher at the lab, explained that the censorship functions are activated regardless of physical location when a user enters a Chinese telephone number to complete Line's verification process. According to the report, the messaging app checks messages against a list that currently includes 370 keywords that are banned in China, ranging from references to former premier Wen Jiabao and political dissidents to phrases related to the persecuted Falun Gong spiritual movement. The banned words are blocked or replaced with asterisks. Line admitted the censorship effort, citing its obligation to comply with Chinese law when operating in China, but it refused to comment on how the blacklisted words are selected. Researchers from the Citizen Lab said the censorship is especially concerning because it shows that the company has the ability to apply the technology to users everywhere, although it appears to be limited to Chinese users for now. In a contrasting case, the freedom of expression advocacy group GreatFire.org reported on November 27 that Microsoft had seemingly lifted censorship on Skype in China. The news came after the U.S.-based software giant ended a joint venture with China's Tom Group, whose locally based Tom Skype service was notorious for monitoring conversations and uploading user information. GreatFire.org's data analysis revealed that user conversations and login information are now encrypted and communicated directly to Microsoft. However, it is unclear whether Microsoft can continue to avoid monitoring and censorship in China, as its new local partner, Guangming Founder, is itself a joint venture between a state-run newspaper and a Beijing technology conglomerate.

- *Japan Times* 11/28/2013: [Line censoring messages in China](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 12/2/2013: [Chat app accused of censoring Chinese users](#)
- Citizen Lab 11/19/2013: [Asia Chats: Investigating regionally-based keyword censorship in LINE](#)
- Reuters 11/27/2013: [Microsoft blocks censorship of Skype in China: advocacy group](#)
- *Sydney Morning Herald* 11/28/2013: [Skype censorship blocked in China](#)
- ZDNet 11/28/2013: [Skype in China reportedly tweaked to remove censorship](#)



Microbloggers face widespread suspensions for content violations

The Communist Party's *Beijing Youth Daily* reported on November 13 that popular Chinese microblogging platform Sina Weibo had suspended or permanently shut down more than 100,000 accounts for violations of the “seven base lines” established at a government-sponsored internet conference in August (see CMB No. [92](#)). According to the article, more than 70 percent of the affected users were punished for making personal attacks. Other alleged offenses included dissemination of false information, distribution of obscene materials, and plagiarism. No mention was made of political violations, which feature prominently in the August “base lines.” Even before those rules were issued, Sina had been implementing a points-based disciplinary system for users since May 2012, sharply reducing the daily number of alleged offenses (see CMB No. [90](#)). On November 28, State Internet Information Office deputy director Ren Xianliang said at a meeting held in Beijing that the government's broader “antirumor” campaign, which has included arrests and intimidation of high-profile bloggers, had been effective. He noted that China's internet space had been “brightened up” after many microblogging accounts were shut down and their owners punished.

- **Global Voices 11/13/2013:** [China: Over 100,000 Weibo users punished for violating 'censorship guidelines'](#)
- **Global Times 11/14/2013:** [Weibo users breach online ethics](#)
- **Wall Street Journal 11/13/2-13:** [Crossing lines: Sina punishes more than 100,000 Weibo accounts](#)
- **Beijing Youth Daily 11/13/2013:** [新浪处理 10 万微博账户 \[Sina handles 100,000 Weibo accounts\]](#)
- **Radio Free Asia 11/28/2013:** [中国互联网信息办公室：打击网络谣言有成效 \[State Internet Information Office: Effort to combat internet rumors has been successful\]](#)

XINJIANG



Graduation blocked for students with ‘incorrect’ political views

In the latest move to clamp down on Xinjiang's tightly restricted Uighur population, several of the region's university administrators said at a recent Communist Party event that students with “incorrect” political views must not be allowed to graduate. The meeting was first reported by the state-run *Xinjiang Daily* on November 26. According to the article, university party secretaries and presidents agreed that their institutions were an important front in the battle against separatism, though it remained unclear whether the authorities had implemented any specific new policy on graduation requirements. Kashgar Teachers College party secretary Xu Yuanzhi said that even students whose academic performance was excellent would not be able to graduate as long as their “political qualifications” were not up to standard. Xinjiang Normal University president Weili Balati, who described the ideological struggle as a “battlefield without gun smoke,” urged participants to pay particular attention to students wearing religious clothing and monitor their online activities. Uighurs, who are mostly Muslim, have long faced heavy discrimination, political repression, and

onerous constraints on their religious and cultural practices, leading to periodic protests and crackdowns as well as unverified accusations of terrorism (see CMB No. [96](#)). On November 21, Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* reported that the Chinese government had created a system to track and translate telephone and online communications in minority languages, including Tibetan and the Turkic language widely spoken by Uighurs. Most security officials in Tibet and Xinjiang belong to China's ethnic Han majority and do not speak local languages. Ding Xiaoqing, a Tsinghua University professor who led the development team, said the surveillance tool would enable officials to pick up warning signs of unrest, including messages embedded in images that are circulated online and via mobile phones.

- **Reuters 11/26/2013: [Xinjiang college says approved political views needed to graduate](#)**
- ***Xinjiang Daily* 11/26/2013: [新疆高校领导：政治不合格的学生绝不能毕业 \[Xinjiang higher education leaders: Politically incorrect students cannot graduate\]](#)**
- **South China Morning Post 11/21/2013: [Beijing's cyberspies step up surveillance of ethnic groups with new language-tracking technology](#)**

BEYOND CHINA



Zimbabwe's ruling party sends team to China for media cooperation

The state-run Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) announced on November 26 that the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF), the country's ruling party, had sent a team to China for a media exchange program aimed partly at “countering Western propaganda.” The delegation was led by ZANU-PF information and publicity secretary Rugare Gumbo, who was scheduled to meet with Chinese Communist Party (CCP) propaganda officials in Beijing and discuss ways to modernize Zimbabwe's print and electronic media. According to London-based SW Radio Africa, the ZBC had received a \$1 million broadcast van from China in August, continuing years of media cooperation between ZANU-PF and the CCP (see CMB No. [64](#)). During a meeting in October, the Chinese ambassador to Zimbabwe, Lin Lin, told Information Minister Jonathan Moyo that Beijing was ready to help Zimbabwe develop its media industry and supply new equipment. In recent years, China has sought to expand its media presence in Africa through collaboration with local governments and establishment of regional bureaus for its own official outlets (see CMB No. [93](#)). Both China and Zimbabwe were rated Not Free in Freedom House's *Freedom of the Press 2013* report.

- **SW Radio Africa 11/28/2013: [ZANU PF seeks Chinese help in media control](#)**
- **Africa Daily 11/27/2013 [ZANU PF dispatches team to China to counter Western propaganda](#)**
- **Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation 11/26/2013: [Zanu PF team off to China](#)**