



# CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

Issue 99: February 11, 2014

## Headlines



Liberal media group sells Beijing paper, turns on anticensorship supporters

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Massive internet outage attributed to censorship error

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Beijing blocks visas for U.S., Taiwanese reporters

## PHOTO OF THE WEEK: TOO HOT TO HANDLE



## BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS



### **Journalists prepare for ideological exam, party cadres receive PR training**

The State General Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SGAPPRFT) in September 2013 announced a plan requiring Chinese journalists to pass a new ideological exam to be held between January and February of this year. The Communist Party–owned *Global Times* reported on December 17 that all Chinese journalists, including those who already held professional certification, would be obliged to participate. News outlets were asked to organize weekly trainings for their employees to prepare for the exam. These sessions would be based on a textbook compiled by the government on six topics: “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” the Marxist view of journalism, journalistic ethics, regulations on journalism, news reporting norms, and “preventing rumors.” The book reportedly includes unambiguous maxims such as “it is absolutely not permitted for published reports to feature any comments that go against the party line.” At least six reporters at state media outlets told Reuters that the increase in official control over the press in the past year has had a chilling effect on journalism. In addition to directly influencing news reporting, the Communist Party has increased training of its members on media relations. The *Economist* reported on February 8 that the China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong (CELAP), a party training center in Shanghai, was offering classes to improve party officials’ handling of press inquiries and scandals. Students are instructed to ensure that their personal behavior does not embarrass the party and government, and to refrain from using charged ideological phrases and bureaucratic jargon. Instead, they are told to use humor and colloquial language when dodging tough questions. One lecturer warned, “In the past we could avoid the press...we could remain silent, but now we can no longer avoid it.”

- *Global Times* 12/17/2013: [Learning the news](#)
- Reuters 12/18/2013: [Testing time for Chinese media as party tightens control](#)
- *Economist* 2/8/2014: [Learning to spin](#)



### **Liberal media group sells Beijing paper, turns on anticensorship supporters**

The Guangzhou-based Southern Media Group announced on January 26 that it had sold its 49 percent stake in the *Beijing News* to Beijing’s municipal propaganda bureau. The newspaper had been known for liberal reporting, despite years of pressure from authorities and the fact that the remaining stake was owned by the Communist Party mouthpiece *Guangming Daily*. Analysts said the 294 million yuan (\$49 million) deal would complete the city authorities’ efforts to bring the *Beijing News* under control (see CMB No. [33](#)). In January 2013, the paper was one of the few media outlets in China to express support for journalists at its sister publication *Southern Weekly*, who staged a three-day strike to protest government censorship of its New Year editorial (see [Special Feature](#)). *Beijing News* was then forced to publish an editorial condemning the strikers, and its president at the time, Dai Zigeng, resigned after attempting to block the move. Many netizens expressed disappointment at the announced buyout and shared a screenshot of the paper’s January

25 front page, in which a headline about President Xi Jinping heading the new National Security Committee was positioned near a photo of an actor wearing an emperor costume (see CMB No. [97](#)). According to *World Journal*, the editors were called in for questioning by their executives over the layout. The Southern Media Group recently came under fire after news emerged that it had submitted written testimony on November 18 that is helping authorities prosecute activists who had supported the January *Southern Weekly* strike by joining peaceful protests outside the paper's offices. The document, which was first made public by prominent blogger Wen Yunchao on December 27, outraged many activists who had previously been supportive of the company's publications. Popular blogger and professor Yu Jianrong wrote on his microblog account, "Now I have to apologize to my readers and promise that if *Southern Weekly* fails to report and explain the situation objectively and fairly, I would never accept the paper's interview again and would never write for this paper." At least 20 former and current *Southern Weekly* employees also posted online comments rejecting the company's testimony and challenging its assertions.

- *South China Morning Post* 1/27/2014: [Sale of stake in outspoken Beijing News may turn it into 'propaganda mouthpiece'](#)
- *Journal* 1/28/2014: [影射習當皇帝新京報編輯被查 \[Beijing News editors questioned for implying Xi an emperor\]](#)
- Global Voices 12/29/2013: [China's Southern Media Group turns back on anti-censorship supporters](#)
- Wen Yunchao 12/27/2013: [南方報業傳媒集團“关于 2013 年 1 月 6 日至 9 日南方報業傳媒集團大門口人群聚焦事件的情況說明”\[Testimony on January 6–9 strike by Southern Media Group\]](#)

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## NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



### Censors suppress information on Xu Zhiyong trial

China's state media and online censors downplayed coverage of the recent conviction of prominent human rights lawyer Xu Zhiyong, a cofounder of the New Citizens Movement (see CMB No. [98](#)). His four-year prison sentence for "gathering a crowd to disturb public order"—including in "public spaces on the internet"—was handed down by Beijing's First Intermediate People's Court on January 26. The verdict followed a closed trial on January 22, during which foreign journalists from outlets such as the U.S.-based Cable News Network (CNN) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) were manhandled and forcibly removed by police and plainclothes thugs when they attempted to approach the courthouse. Most popular web portals carried only a brief announcement of the verdict produced by the official China News Network. The Communist Party-owned *Global Times* was the sole newspaper to publish commentary about the trial. Its English-language version condemned "Western media" for politicizing the verdict, while its Chinese version criticized "the West" for supporting Chinese dissidents as part of a plot to gain influence in China. The State Council Information Office reportedly ordered websites to remove an open letter written by Xu to Chinese president Xi Jinping, as well as his closing statement, "For Freedom, Justice, and Love," which the trial judge did not allow to be fully read in court. According to the *Fei*

*Chang Dao* blog, the Chinese search engine Baidu censored the closing statement. For example, the search term “Xu’s final statement,” which generated 116,000 results on January 25, yielded only 813 results on January 26, with a message that read, “Due to regulations, most results cannot be shown.” The government has continued to persecute other members of the New Citizens Movement, but on January 22 it unexpectedly released wealthy venture capitalist and Xu ally Wang Gongquan, claiming that he had confessed to joining Xu in “criminal behavior.” Wang, known as a popular and active microblogger, had been in detention since September 2013, and reportedly went through 92 interrogation sessions and 60 days in solitary confinement. Shortly after his release, Wang briefly reappeared on the Sina Weibo microblogging platform with a new account using a pseudonym; censors quickly shut it down after it garnered 10,000 followers in 24 hours.

- *Time* 1/22/2014: [CNN, BBC reporters covering China activist trial manhandled on live TV](#)  
*Fei Chang Dao* 1/27/2014: [Baidu censors results for Xu Zhiyong’s closing statement to the court](#)
- *Huanqiu* 1/28/2014: [社評：支持中国異見人士，西方的“阳謀”\[Supporting the dissidents in China; the open conspiracy of Western countries\]](#)
- *Global Times* 1/27/2014: [Xu Zhiyong sentenced to four years](#)
- *China Digital Times* 1/28/2014: [Minitrue: Silencing Xu Zhiyong](#)
- *China Digital Times* 1/26/2014: [Minitrue: The Xu Zhiyong case](#)
- *Sydney Morning Herald* 1/31/2014: [Wang Gongquan: The mysterious return of the microblogger](#)
- Freedom House 1/27/2014: [Court verdict against Xu Zhiyong is travesty of justice](#)



## Massive internet outage attributed to censorship error

On January 21, China’s internet suffered a major disruption, with service reportedly crippled for a large proportion of the country’s users and many websites rendered inaccessible. The event began at 3 p.m. Beijing time and lasted between two and eight hours, according to different sources. Chinese officials and state-owned media like the *Global Times* attributed it to a hacking attack, but investigations by outside experts found that it was more likely due to a glitch in the nationwide filtering system commonly known as the Great Firewall. According to Nicholas Weaver, a researcher at the International Computer Science Institute, what appeared to have happened was that a large proportion of China’s internet traffic was accidentally redirected to the internet protocol (IP) address registered to Dynamic Internet Technology, a company that produces tools used to circumvent censorship. “The rule was supposed to be, ‘Block everything going to this IP address,’” Weaver told the *Washington Post*. “Instead, they screwed up and probably wrote the rule as ‘Block everything by referring to this IP address.’” This is not the first time that the Great Firewall’s filtering accidentally caused a large disruption to internet traffic. Though it is not possible to prove conclusively, the timing of the latest glitch might reflect a sudden, intensified effort by censors to block access to popular circumvention tools on the day that the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) unveiled a report documenting the offshore financial accounts of over 20,000 Chinese officials and their relatives. The release of the study, in English and Chinese, was immediately followed by reports of wholesale blocks on the ICIJ’s website and those of partner

news outlets like Spain's *El País*, while Britain's *Guardian* and others suffered partial blocking. Past releases of scandalous information by overseas sources have prompted spikes in the use of circumvention tools as Chinese residents attempt to access the blocked material. A leaked censorship directive by the State Council Information Office, dated January 21, notably mentioned the two events together, urging websites to "1. Immediately find and remove the foreign media report 'China's Secret Offshore Tax Havens' and related content," and "2.... [S]top stirring up the article 'Chinese Internet "Paralysis"; Affected IPs Redirect to American Company.'"

- **Bloomberg 1/23/2014:** [Chinese internet outage may be result of censorship changes](#)
- **Washington Post 1/22/2014:** [China accuses hackers for Internet disruption; experts suspect censors](#)
- **Global Times 1/22/2014:** [Hacker attack may have shut down internet: expert](#)
- **ICIJ 1/21/2014:** [Leaked records reveal offshore holdings of China's elite](#)
- **Reporters Without Borders 1/24/2014:** [China censors reports about elite's hidden funds](#)
- **Guardian 1/22/2014:** [Guardian blocked in China after story about leadership's offshore wealth](#)
- **China Digital Times 1/22/2014:** [Minitrue: Offshore taxes, onshore cyberattack](#)



## **Guarding Xi's image, officials block online 'bun' criticism and arrest publisher**

After President Xi Jinping appeared for lunch at a Qingfeng Steamed Bun Shop in Beijing on December 28, photos of him paying for the food and sitting at a table among ordinary diners were widely disseminated online. The official Xinhua news agency reported the incident on its Sina Weibo microblogging account, and several popular Chinese web portals reposted the item, which seemed to dovetail with Xi's calls for greater humility among Communist Party officials (see CMB Nos. [79](#), [86](#)). The visit also echoed the down-to-earth behavior of former U.S. ambassador Gary Locke, which had won the admiration of many in China (see CMB No. [97](#)). However, netizens reacted to the Xi coverage with considerable skepticism. One netizen wrote, "It seems that anti-corruption, constitutionalism, freedom, democracy, human rights, and the people's livelihood are all less important than eating steamed dumplings!" Another noted that when U.S. president Barack Obama dined in public, Chinese media usually called it a publicity stunt. Online censors soon responded to the criticism. Satirical cartoons and phrases such as "put on a show" and "new administration" combined with Xi's name were blocked on Sina Weibo. According to *China Digital Times*, the State Council Information Office issued a directive on January 17 that ordered all web portals to remove a *Beijing Youth Daily* interview published on the same day in which Zhu Yuling, president of the company that owns the Qingfeng chain, reported a boost in business since Xi's visit. In another sign of the authorities' determination to protect the president's image, it emerged in January that a Hong Kong-based publisher who was preparing to release a dissident writer's book on Xi had been detained since October 27. Yao Wentian, the editor in chief of Morning Bell Press, was taken into custody while delivering paint to a friend in Shenzhen, a mainland city just over the border from Hong Kong. He was accused of "smuggling prohibited items." According to Yu Jie, the U.S.-based

author whose book—*Chinese Godfather Xi Jinping*—Yao was set to release in Hong Kong in April, the two were routinely harassed during their previous collaborations on books about Chinese leaders (see CMB No. [66](#)). The London-based literary rights group PEN International reported that Yao, who is 73 and suffers from asthma and a heart complaint, was denied medical parole in December.

- *China Digital Times* 1/31/2014: [River crabbed: Spotlight on Xi's lunch](#)
- *China Digital Times* 1/17/2014: [Minitrue: Cool down Xi Jinping's lunch story](#)
- *China Digital Times* 1/14/2014: [Sensitive words: Steamed buns, rumor, dictatorship](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 1/21/2014: [Hong Kong publisher Yao Wentian, working on Xi Jinping book, held on mainland China](#)
- PEN International 1/28/2014: [China: Mounting concerns for detained publisher Yao Wentian amidst renewed crackdown on dissent](#)



## Regulator requires real-name registration for video uploads

On January 20, China's State General Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film, and Television (SGAPPRFT) issued a new rule requiring internet users to register with their real names when uploading videos online. The rule instructs video site administrators to take down any content posted by users who did not register with their real identities. The regulator said the new restrictions were aimed at preventing the dissemination of vulgar, violent, and sexual content, but they were widely seen as part of a broader, ongoing effort to purge the Chinese internet of politically sensitive material. Online video sites have about 428 million users in the country, and they are often used to share information on official corruption and abuse. The authorities have steadily reduced the space for anonymous online activity, with earlier rules requiring real-name registration for microblogs and telecommunication services, among others (see CMB Nos. [78](#), [90](#)). There have been some problems with implementation of these requirements, but the evidence suggests that they have been among several factors leading to reduced microblog usage and inhibited free discussion online (see below).

- CNET 1/21/2014: [Amid censorship, China requires real-name use for video uploads](#)
- Reuters 1/21/2014: [China orders real name register for online video uploads](#)
- *The Next Web* 1/21/2014: [China now wants Internet users who upload videos to provide their real names](#)
- *Huffington Post* 1/22/2014: [The videos the Chinese government doesn't want you to see](#)
- SGAPPRFT 1/20/2014: [国家新闻出版广电总局印发关于进一步完善网络剧、微电影等网络视听节目管理的补充通知 \[Additional information on management of online videos, micro-movies and other video programs\]](#)



## Weibo usage battered by crackdown and rise of WeChat

Britain's *Telegraph* newspaper reported on January 30 that according to a study it commissioned, activity on the popular microblogging service Sina Weibo had plummeted by as much as 70 percent

after the government began clamping down on online “rumors” and arresting hundreds of users in the summer of 2013 (see graph in first link below; CMB No. [93](#)). Other evidence of the drop in usage has been reported in recent months, and influential bloggers with large followings have been especially affected by government pressure. He Weifang, a liberal law professor at Peking University who had over 1.1 million followers, announced on December 31 that he was closing his Sina Weibo account. He told Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post* that he was disappointed to see opinion leaders leaving Weibo or going silent as well as a sharp decrease in meaningful discussion of public affairs on the service. The professor was also “uncomfortable” with insults and abusive comments that Communist Party supporters have posted in response to his writings. Other prominent Weibo bloggers echoed He’s remarks and reported the disappearance of friends from the platform. Media reports indicate that many Weibo users have migrated to the mobile-messaging application WeChat. The app, operated by the Chinese internet giant Tencent, had over 600 million users as of October 2013, whereas Sina Weibo users numbered 536 million as of February 2013, with fewer than 50 million active users. Many netizens prefer WeChat for its privacy options, such as peer-to-peer chatting and closed, invitation-only messaging groups. WeChat is subject to extensive surveillance, but deletions are less common than on Weibo. Experts have warned that WeChat, with its closed groups, does not offer the same public forum for political discussion as Weibo, and that restrictions on the newer service may increase as it becomes more popular and influential in shaping public opinion.

- *Telegraph* 1/30/2014: [China kills off discussion on Weibo after internet crackdown](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 1/1/2014: [Prominent scholar He Weifang says ‘goodbye’ to online debate](#)
- *Global Voices* 1/3/2014: [Chinese netizens \(and political discourse\) migrate to WeChat](#)
- *Global Voices* 1/6/2014: [Censorship, prosecution drive exodus of opinion leaders from China’s Sina Weibo](#)

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## XINJIANG



### **Uighur academic Ilham Tohti held incommunicado, name censored online**

Ilham Tohti, a prominent Uighur activist and economics professor at Beijing’s Central Nationalities University, has been missing since January 15. He was taken from his home by more than 20 police officers, who also confiscated computers, mobile telephones, and documents. Despite frequent harassment and intimidation by the Chinese authorities, Tohti has been a vocal online critic of Beijing’s human rights abuses in Xinjiang, and regularly speaks with foreign media on Uighur issues (see CMB No. [96](#)). A January 24 statement on the official microblogging account of the public security bureau in Urumqi, Xinjiang’s capital, alleged that Tohti had incited separatism. It accused him of encouraging Uighur students and others to use violence against the Chinese authorities, and claimed that he had recruited followers through his website. Tohti’s wife, Guzaili Nu’er, and their two children have been under round-the-clock surveillance since his arrest. She told Hong Kong’s *South China Morning Post* that the accusations against her husband were “groundless,” and that the authorities had not disclosed his whereabouts. Chinese and Uighur activists have reiterated that

Tohti never advocated violence, but they saw the allegations as an ominous sign that the authorities intend to impose a harsh punishment on him. Searches for his name were reportedly censored on the Sina Weibo microblogging service. Separately, Radio Free Asia reported on February 5 that Niyaz Kahar, a journalist and blogger who ran the popular Uighur web portal Golden Tarim, had been sentenced to 13 years in prison on separatism charges in a closed hearing after being arrested in July 2009. He had disappeared during a crackdown in the wake of ethnic rioting that month, and his family only learned of his fate a year later; the Radio Free Asia report marked the first time they spoke publicly about the case. Thousands of Uighurs remain unaccounted for in Xinjiang, having been detained during the 2009 crackdown or subsequent security sweeps by Chinese authorities.

- Radio Free Asia 1/15/2014: [Uyghur scholar, mother detained in Beijing](#)  
Reporters Without Borders 1/29/2014: [Where has Ilham Tohti been held since 15 January?](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 1/25/2014: [Uyghur scholar Ilham Tohti accused of 'separatist offences' by prosecutors](#)
- *China Digital Times* 1/17/2014: [Sensitive words: Ilham \(Tohti\), Song Binbin & more](#)
- Radio Free Asia 2/5/2014: [Missing Uyghur journalist found jailed on 'separatism' charges](#)

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## HONG KONG



### **'Ming Pao' chief editor replaced amid censorship concerns**

On January 6, Hong Kong's widely circulated *Ming Pao* newspaper announced the abrupt replacement of its chief editor, Kevin Lau Chun-to. The new editor was expected to be Chong Tien-siong, a Malaysian national who is perceived as progovernment; Lau was transferred to a post managing the paper's internet business. Though *Ming Pao* has faced accusations of being more pro-establishment since the 1995 sale of a controlling stake to a Malaysian timber tycoon with business interests in China, it has also been known for its aggressive investigative reporting on Hong Kong and Chinese officials. Under Lau, who became chief editor in 2012, the paper pursued an investigation of illegal building by Hong Kong chief executive Leung Chun-ying, and was a partner of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) on its recent report regarding the secretive offshore holdings of Chinese elites. The sudden decision to replace Lau came amid growing concern about Beijing's influence over Hong Kong's media, raising speculation that the owners sacrificed him to appease the Chinese government. Employees at *Ming Pao* said they were shocked to hear the news, noting that Lau had led the staff in "resisting pressure from the invisible hands who try to meddle in the newsroom at critical moments." Hundreds of employees and Hong Kong residents gathered outside the newspaper's headquarters in black clothing or signed a petition to the management to protest the decision. *Ming Pao* published an official statement vowing to continue its unbiased reporting, but a joint letter by a group of Hong Kong academics warned of eroding press freedom at the paper and in Hong Kong as a whole. After a number of meetings between staff and management, the original decision to replace Lau with Chong appeared to remain unchanged.

- Committee to Protect Journalists 1/8/2014: [Staff of Hong Kong's Ming Pao fights leadership change](#)
- RTHK 1/13/2014: [Concern over replacement of chief editor](#)  
*South China Morning Post* 1/24/2014: [Ming Pao brouhaha underlines threat to Hong Kong's media freedoms](#)
- *Standard* 1/14/2014: [Cheung respects Ming Pao boss over chief editor row](#)
- *New York Times* 1/30/2014: [Hong Kong paper ousts top editor, stirring concern](#)
- *Irrawaddy* 2/7/2014: [China leans on Hong Kong's press](#)

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## BEYOND CHINA



### Beijing blocks visas for U.S., Taiwanese reporters

The Chinese authorities in recent weeks have continued to fine-tune their use of visa denials and website blocks to punish or deter critical reporting by foreign media outlets. At the end of 2013, it appeared that some two dozen foreign correspondents, particularly from the *New York Times* and Bloomberg News, would be effectively expelled due to officials' refusal to grant them press cards or visa renewals (see CMB No. [98](#)). Following international pressure, including private and public appeals by U.S. vice president Joe Biden, the authorities in late December granted documents to most of the journalists in question. However, *New York Times* journalist Austin Ramzy, previously a China correspondent for *Time* magazine, was forced to leave the country at the end of January after officials failed to issue him a visa for his new position at the newspaper. Ramzy continues to report for the *Times* from Taiwan. Separately, on February 9, two Taiwanese journalists from *Apple Daily* and the U.S. government-funded Radio Free Asia, both known for their critical coverage of the Chinese government, were denied visas to join a media delegation accompanying Taiwanese officials to the mainland for an important bilateral meeting. One of the topics on the agenda is increasing the presence of each side's media outlets across the Taiwan Strait. Freedom House and other press freedom watchdogs condemned the visa decisions, and Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council expressed its disappointment and urged Beijing to respect press freedom. Reporters from the outspoken *Apple Daily*, which has both Taiwan and Hong Kong editions, have periodically been barred from the mainland, and Radio Free Asia broadcasts are jammed, though listeners can reach them online using censorship circumvention software. In a more positive development, mainlanders' access to the Chinese-language websites of Reuters and the *Wall Street Journal* was restored in early January. The sites had been blocked in November, apparently due to articles on business links between foreign financial firms and relatives of top Chinese officials (see CMB No. [97](#)). The websites of the *New York Times* and Bloomberg News have been blocked since 2012, when they reported on the family wealth of Chinese leaders.

- *Guardian* 1/29/2014: [New York Times journalist forced to leave China after visa row](#)
- IFJ 2/10/2014: [IFJ condemns China's refusal to issue visas to Taiwanese journalists](#)
- Freedom House 2/10/2014: [Freedom House condemns China visa refusal to Taiwanese journalists](#)

- *Liberty Times* 2/9/2014: [王張會將討論新聞資訊對等 \[Wang-Zhang meeting to discuss equal access of news and information\]](#)
  - *Politico* 1/6/2014: [China unblocks Reuters, Wall Street Journal](#)
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## NOTABLE ANALYSIS



### **China Media Project content analysis finds shift in 2013 political discourse**

On January 6, Qian Gang of the China Media Project at Hong Kong University published detailed and insightful findings about a palpable change in political discourse in Chinese media in 2013. His conclusions are based on content analysis of key political terms appearing in state-run and commercial media outlets and online news sources in China. Among his findings were an increased attack on democratic concepts and greater use of Communist Party propaganda with Maoist overtones. For example, the tone of coverage for terms such as “universal values” and “constitutionalism,” which was predominantly positive in 2012, swung to predominantly negative in 2013. Meanwhile, appearances of the phrase “Mao Zedong Thought” skyrocketed, and the term “intraparty democracy” was replaced by the less reformist “deliberative democracy” in the party’s proposals for limited political change.

- **China Media Project 1/6/2014:** [China’s political discourse in 2013](#)
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### **IFJ annual report notes press freedom decline in 2013**

On January 29, the International Federation of Journalists published its annual report on press freedom in China, Hong Kong, and Macau, drawing in part on information from journalists working in these localities. Ominously titled *Back to a Maoist Future*, the 59-page study notes that after several years of deterioration, “the situation became even worse in 2013” in China, while media in Hong Kong faced “unprecedented pressure.”

- **IFJ 1/29/2014:** [Back to a Maoist future: Press freedom in China 2013](#)
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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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