



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

Issue No. 45: February 2, 2012 Headlines

-  Media pressure forces state concessions on air quality
-  Twitter unveils location-based censorship, netizens react
-  Google thrives in China despite search engine pullout
-  Hacking of Canadian law firms traced to China
-  U.S. paper examines Taiwan's pro-China media owner

BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS

Media pressure forces state concessions on air quality

On February 1, under pressure from both traditional and online media, Beijing's Municipal Environmental Protection Bureau promised to set up 30 monitoring stations by the end of 2012 to inform the public of the capital's air quality, including readings on the most dangerous particle size, known as PM 2.5. Beginning in May 2011, a group of netizens in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou bought their own measurement devices and initiated daily reporting of pollution online. As the data was no longer secret, the government's environmental propaganda, including the claim that Beijing had experienced 286 "blue-sky days" in 2011, faced harsh criticism online (see CMB No. [42](#)). Traditional media also took up the cause. The Beijing-based liberal magazine *Caixin* cited the U.S. embassy's data on air pollution in the city and demanded an explanation for the discrepancy with official figures. Even the state-run *China Daily* quoted experts who raised concerns about the levels of PM 2.5 particles in the air. A January 30 blog post by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) described the media activism on the issue and noted other examples of press exposés that had an impact on Chinese government policy over the years, despite strict state censorship. However, even when journalists succeed in pressuring the government, they have often

paid a high price, facing dismissal or jail time after triggering scandals through their reporting (see CMB No. [30](#)).

- **Committee to Protect Journalists 1/30/2012:** [Chinese press has impact, against the odds](#)
- **New York Times 1/27/2012:** [Activists crack China's wall of denial about air pollution](#)
- **China Daily 2/1/2012:** [Beijing to set up PM 2.5 monitoring stations](#)



Exiled journalist decries 'hooliganization' of political system

In an interview with the *New York Review of Books* posted on January 27, veteran editor and commentator Chang Ping, who is now living with his wife and daughter in Germany at a refuge house for persecuted writers, said that “democracy is a way to bring justice” to Chinese society. Previously an editor at the liberally oriented Guangdong newspaper *Southern Metropolis Daily*, Chang was demoted over his articles about the 2008 uprisings in Tibet. He was later forced to quit in January 2011. Speaking as a victim of the ongoing media crackdown in China, he said the authorities “just arrest people and throw them in jail or mental asylums” without regard for the rule of law. He characterized such practices as part of the gradual “hooliganization of the political system” over the past decade. Chang seemed optimistic about *iSun Affairs*, a Hong Kong-based independent magazine for which he currently works as an editor. The magazine has been able to cover sensitive topics including jailed Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo, press freedom in China, and independent candidates running for local office. However, Chang acknowledged that influence from the mainland may be responsible for the fact that Hong Kong’s immigration authorities have neither approved nor rejected his work visa application since he filed it in March 2011 (see CMB No. [41](#)). Chang was one of eight activists whose names *China Media Bulletin* editors checked in a July 2011 censorship test, finding that search results for his name on the popular Sina Weibo microblogging service were removed under pressure from the authorities (see CMB No. [29](#)).

- **New York Review of Books 1/27/2012:** [Is democracy Chinese? An interview with journalist Chang Ping](#)



State media pile on Human Rights Watch after critical report

State media have expressed outrage over the China section of an annual report published on January 22 by New York-based Human Rights Watch (HRW). Nicholas Bequelin, HRW’s senior Asia researcher, noted on his Twitter microblog account on January 30 that the state-run newspapers *People’s Daily* and *China Daily* had published 10 articles on his organization in the week since the report’s release. An op-ed article in *China Daily* accused HRW of using double standards and showing political bias. *People’s Daily* wrote that “Western anxieties” over China’s economic progress

motivated criticism of the country's rights record. Other *People's Daily* articles sought to specifically refute HRW's assessment of Chinese government policy in Tibet and its criticism of the Chinese judicial system. The Chinese government usually avoids drawing public attention to the work of groups like HRW, whose website (including the new report) is blocked in China. In April 2011, China's State Council Information Office released a report on human rights in the United States, in an apparent tit-for-tat response to the U.S. State Department's annual human rights reports on virtually every country in the world. The Chinese report said the United States had "turned a blind eye to its own terrible human rights situation and seldom mentioned it," but roughly 80 percent of the sources cited in the document were U.S. media outlets, websites, government entities, and nongovernmental organizations—notably including HRW (see CMB No. [19](#)).

- **Human Rights Watch 1/22/2012: [Country summary: China](#)**
- ***People's Daily* 1/29/2012: [Human rights accusations mere slander](#)**
- **Xinhua 1/29/2012: [Tibetan relocation claims condemned](#)**
- ***China Digital Times* 1/31/2012: [State media responds to rights report](#)**



Jailed writer tried for provocative poem

Zhejiang-based writer Zhu Yufu, one of several authors and online dissidents who received harsh prison terms or formal charges during the holiday season, was tried for subversion in Hangzhou on January 31 (see CMB No. [44](#)). He had been arrested in April 2011 over a poem entitled "It's Time," in which he alluded to the Arab Spring and called for Chinese people to defend their rights. Zhu denied the charges in his January 16 indictment, saying he had only shared the poem with friends rather than posting it on discussion forums. The court said more time was needed to verify the evidence, according to Zhu's lawyer, Li Dunyong, though a verdict was expected by mid-February. Li said prosecutors cited messages Zhu had sent via the online chat service Skype, which is popular among Chinese activists; police had seized Zhu's computer, which contained his contacts and passwords. Zhu's wife, who attended the trial with their son, expressed concern that he could face a prison term of nine years or longer, as had other dissident writers in recent weeks. In many cases, restrictions have also been imposed on family members of dissidents. On January 25, the daughter of jailed activist lawyer Ni Yulan—who was tried on December 29 but is also awaiting a verdict—was barred from traveling to the Netherlands to accept a Dutch human rights prize on her mother's behalf, and later complained of police harassment.

- **Associated Press 1/31/2012: [Chinese dissident writer tried for inciting subversion; no immediate verdict](#)**
- **Reuters 1/31/2012: [Chinese activist on trial over Skype poem](#)**
- **Deutsche Presse-Agentur 1/31/2012: [China tries veteran dissident over 'subversive' poem](#)**
- **Agence France-Presse 1/31/2012: [Daughter of China activist says barred from taking prize](#)**

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Twitter unveils location-based censorship, netizens react

On January 26, the U.S.-based microblogging service Twitter announced that “starting today, we give ourselves the ability to reactively withhold content from users in a specific country—while keeping it available in the rest of the world.” Netizens in China and other observers immediately expressed concern that the company would begin complying with the Chinese government’s censorship requirements. Its service is currently blocked in China. An article in the state-run *Global Times* congratulated Twitter for finally following “pragmatic commercial rules.” Prominent Chinese users who now gain access to Twitter through circumvention tools threatened to boycott the service despite having limited alternatives. Prominent artist Ai Weiwei warned that “if Twitter censors, I’ll stop tweeting.” Twitter chief executive Dick Costolo denied that the new policy’s aim was to appease the Chinese government, saying, “I don’t think the current environment in China is one in which we can operate.” Similarly, Twitter lawyer Alex Macgillivray told the *Wall Street Journal* that the removal system probably was not enough to satisfy Beijing, since posts would not be prescreened. Instead, the platform will respond to government blocking requests from different countries, notify the targeted account’s owner, and leave the blocked postings available to users in other countries. To ensure transparency, Twitter will also compile and publish the takedown notices on Chilling Effects, an internet freedom advocacy website. Eva Galperin of the San Francisco–based Electronic Frontier Foundation, a free expression advocacy group, agreed that such archives on Chilling Effects will facilitate tracking of government censorship demands, as long as Twitter is honest and prompt about the postings. She urged users to be vigilant and hold the company to its promises.

- Twitter 1/26/2012: [Tweets still must flow](#)
- *Global Times* 1/30/2012: [Twitter critics confuse politics with business decision](#)
- NTDTV 1/30/2012: [Twitter announces censorship plans, Chinese netizens outraged](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 1/27/2012: [What would it take to get Twitter unblocked in China?](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 1/31/2012: [Twitter CEO: New policy for transparency, not censoring](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 1/27/2012: [Twitter lawyer responds to censorship controversy](#)
- Electronic Frontier Foundation 1/27/2012: [What does Twitter’s country-by-country takedown system mean for freedom of expression?](#)



Google thrives in China despite search engine pullout

In an interview with New York–based Bloomberg Television on January 23, Daniel Alegre, president of Asia-Pacific operations for U.S. technology giant Google, said the company’s business in China is growing and “continues to thrive” two years after a clash with the authorities over censorship. In January 2010, Google stopped censoring its search results and began redirecting Chinese users to its uncensored search engine in Hong Kong. Amid growing demands for advertising services in the country, Alegre emphasized that Google “never left China and we continue to believe in the market.” He said the company is focusing on products that are “non-

sensitive” in China. For example, some 58 percent of smartphones in the country used Google’s Android operating system as of November 2011. The company is in negotiations with the government over a license to continue offering its mapping service, which, like that of its Chinese competitor Baidu, now also presents indoor floor plans for shopping malls and other public venues. After rumors circulated that Google’s mapping service might be shut down because it missed an application deadline on February 1, the Bureau of Mapping and Surveying confirmed on February 2 that the company had submitted the paperwork in November 2011 and could continue offering mapping services while the application was being processed.

- **Bloomberg 1/23/2012:** [Google China business grows, ‘continues to thrive,’ Alegre says](#)
 - **The Next Web: 2/1/2012:** [Google in talks with Chinese authorities to keep Google Maps operational there](#)
 - **M.I.C. Gadget 12/8/2011:** [Baidu Maps adds feature for checking interior floor plans](#)
 - **Penn Olson 2/2/2012:** [Rumors of Google Maps death in China were indeed exaggerated](#)
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Planned Facebook IPO boosts Chinese rivals’ shares

On January 27, after news broke that the popular U.S.-based social-networking website Facebook would file for an initial public offering (IPO) in early February, shares in the Chinese social-networking company Renren surged 26 percent to \$5.25 in New York, its highest price in more than eight months. Shares in Sina, which owns the Chinese microblogging site Sina Weibo, rose 12 percent. Analysts said the anticipated Facebook IPO has likely increased investors’ interest in other social-networking companies, and Sina and Renren are positioned to benefit from China’s booming online population. According to official figures released on January 23, internet users in the country have reached 513 million, and almost half of them are microblog users (see CMB No. 44). Investors were apparently betting that the potential of this market outweighed the risks of investing in Chinese internet firms, including the authorities’ ongoing drive to impose stricter controls on social media and recent concerns over accounting fraud by other U.S.-listed Chinese companies. Facebook is currently blocked in China, leaving it accessible only via circumvention tools, since it does not comply with government censorship directives.

- **Bloomberg 1/27/2012:** [Chinese Internet companies jump on WSJ report of Facebook initial offering](#)
 - **Wall Street Journal 1/31/2012:** [Too much face for Renren](#)
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TIBET



Leafleting, police gunfire continue in Sichuan’s Tibetan areas

The London-based rights group Free Tibet reported that on January 26, a Tibetan youth named

Urgen was shot dead by police in Ngaba Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province. According to Radio Free Asia, Urgen was killed during a standoff with the police as they tried to detain his classmate, Tharpa, for distributing flyers and posters that expressed solidarity with Tibetans who had self-immolated to protest Chinese rule. The leaflets bore Tharpa's name and photograph and reportedly invited the authorities to arrest him. Well over a dozen Tibetans have reportedly set themselves on fire since March 2011, and several others have allegedly been killed in confrontations between police and protesters in the past two weeks (see CMB No. [44](#)). Amid an extensive security clampdown, journalists have been unable to gain access to the region. CNN China correspondent Stan Grant and his crew were stopped by the police on January 31 before they could reach the Tibetan areas of Sichuan. The prominent blogger and writer Woesser has described the situation in Tibet on her Twitter account. On January 27, she wrote about the extreme, multilayered security measures being imposed by the authorities, including multiple checkpoints and thorough searches for travelers.

- **Radio Free Asia 1/27/2012: [Town besieged after shooting](#)**
 - **CNN 1/31/2012: [CNN crew detained amid crackdown](#)**
 - **Free Tibet 1/27/2012: [Tibetan shot dead in Ngaba Autonomous Prefecture](#)**
 - **[Woesser on Twitter](#) (in Chinese)**
 - **Phayul 1/31/2012: [CNN crew detained and thrown out of restive Tibetan region](#)**
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HONG KONG & MACAU



Government to award new TV licenses

The Hong Kong government is preparing to issue new broadcasting licenses for free-to-air television. Currently, the only licensed outlets are Television Broadcasts (TVB) and Asia Television (ATV), and the lack of competition has raised doubts about the diversity of news coverage in the territory. Ricky Wong Wai-kay, who is a member of a Chinese government advisory body, heads one of the three companies that have applied for licenses. He said he expected losses in the first three to four years, but believes that the Hong Kong television market is big enough to support newcomers. Existing stations earn HK\$3 billion (\$386 million) a year from advertising, with the bulk going to TVB and ATV. Decisions to grant or refuse licenses are made by the executive branch rather than an independent body. Chief Executive Donald Tsang and the Executive Council are expected to approve the candidates and issue the licenses within a few months. While the government-owned Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) transmits its own radio content, its television programming is carried by the commercial stations. The government has rejected proposals to transform RTHK into an independent public station (see CMB No. [41](#)).

- ***Standard* 1/30/2012: [Free-TV hopeful in hiring spree](#)**
 - ***South China Morning Post* 1/31/2012: [City Telecom set for license to thrill](#)**
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Macau holds literary festival

Macau is holding a literary festival called Script Road, scheduled to run from January 29 to February 4. The festival, organized by media magnate Ricardo Pinto, aims to bring together writers, filmmakers, and journalists from China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Portugal—the former colonial power that ruled Macau until 1999, when it was handed over to China. Among the participants are Su Tong, who was awarded the 2009 Man Asian Literary Prize. The program includes a panel discussion on why writers might be more important than politicians when it comes to affecting people’s perspectives on politics. Macau, like Hong Kong, is administered under a “one country, two systems” policy. Residents still enjoy greater political rights and civil liberties than those on the mainland, where artistic and cultural affairs have been subjected to mounting government control over the past year. In 2009 Macau passed new national security legislation that many feared would limit the space for free expression. Since then, prodemocracy activists from Hong Kong have been barred entry, though there were no reports of problems surrounding the festival.

- *Wall Street Journal* 1/30/2012: [In Macau, a literary fest blooms among the casinos](#)
 - [Script Road](#)
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BEYOND CHINA



Hacking of Canadian law firms traced to China

Bloomberg reported on January 31 that over the course of a few months beginning in September 2010, China-based hackers infiltrated several Canadian law firms and government entities as part of a broader attempt to derail a \$40 billion mining deal, in which Australia’s BHP Billiton was to acquire Canada’s Potash Corp. of Saskatchewan. The acquisition fell through for other reasons, but the Bloomberg article said the incident showed how law firms have become vulnerable and enticing targets for internet-based commercial espionage. Daniel Tobok, whose security company, Digital Wyzdom, was hired to help investigate the 2010 hacking, said data stolen from law firms can be worth “tens of millions of dollars” and provide an unfair advantage in negotiations. According to Tobok, China-based servers were detected in the attack, and the spyware it employed was created on a Chinese-language keyboard. While it remains unclear who has been directing a recent surge in cyberattacks on North American law firms, the Chinese government has denied involvement in the BHP-Potash case.

- *Businessweek* 2/1/2012: [China-based hackers target law firms to get secret deal data](#)
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U.S. paper examines Taiwan’s pro-China media owner

On January 21, the *Washington Post* ran a story profiling Taiwanese tycoon Tsai Eng-meng, owner of Want Want rice cracker factories in China and a growing media empire in Taiwan, where his outlets have increasingly pushed for closer ties with China. Tsai owns *China Times*, one of the four biggest newspapers in Taiwan, as well as other print and digital media outlets. Since Tsai bought the *China*

Times in 2008, a number of incidents have raised concerns about bias and editorial restrictions on journalists. According to the *Washington Post*, an editor at *China Times* was fired after the paper published an article that criticized a high-ranking Chinese government official as “third rate.” Tsai responded that journalists were free to criticize, but “need to think carefully before they write” lest they cause offense. Former employees said the paper has become sharply pro-China. Want Want’s company brochure explains that the goal is to “promote peace and harmony across the Strait.” Former Tiananmen Square student leader Wuer Kaixi told the *Post* that after Tsai bought *China Times*, he stopped receiving invitations to write columns. Tsai said he believes that reports of a massacre at the square in 1989 were not true, remarking that after seeing the now-famous photograph of a tank pausing before a single protester, he “realized that not that many people could really have died.” On February 1, Tiananmen activist Wang Dan and a group of Taiwanese civil society groups published an open letter inviting Tsai to join them in a public dialogue about the 1989 massacre, human rights in China more generally, and ways to promote professionalism and freedom in the media.

- *Washington Post* 1/21/2012: [Tycoon prods Taiwan closer to China](#)
- [Wang Dan’s letter to Tsai Eng-meng](#) (in Chinese)
- *Xinhua* 3/15/2010 (in Chinese): [Want Want CEO Tsai Eng-meng: Make the Taiwan audience understand the real mainland](#)

NOTABLE ANALYSIS



New Rebecca MacKinnon book examines internet freedom

In January, Basic Books published *Consent of the Networked: The Worldwide Struggle for Internet Freedom* by former CNN correspondent and internet freedom expert Rebecca MacKinnon. The volume explores the ways in which the internet and advanced web applications can be used to both expand and restrict freedom. MacKinnon says that “it is time to stop arguing over whether the Internet empowers people, and address the urgent question of how technology should be governed to support the rights and liberties of users around the world.” The book contains several chapters exploring the dynamics of censorship and resistance in China. In late January, Canada’s *National Post* newspaper reprinted two excerpts—one on how the Chinese authorities force private companies to censor, and the other on how internet tools have empowered netizens.

- *National Post* 1/29/2012: [Inside China’s censorship machine](#)
- *National Post* 1/28/2012: [Rebecca MacKinnon: China’s ‘networked authoritarianism’](#)
- Rebecca MacKinnon: [Consent of the Networked: The Worldwide Struggle for Internet Freedom](#)

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

[Freedom on the Net 2011](#)
[Freedom in the World 2011](#)
[Freedom of the Press 2010](#)

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