








CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

Issue No. 46: February 9, 2012 Headlines

-  China's UN veto on Syria
-  Media offer diverse responses to Wukan elections
-  Microblog real-name rule begins to cut usage growth
-  Qihoo fumes after app rejection by Apple
-  Communications cut off in restive Sichuan regions

BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS

State outlets, censors defend China's UN veto on Syria

Chinese state-run media have been busy defending Beijing's February 4 decision to veto a United Nations Security Council resolution that called for Syrian president Bashar al-Assad—whose regime has been engaged in a ruthless 11-month crackdown on antigovernment protesters—to step down. In a commentary on February 7, the Communist Party mouthpiece *People's Daily* said China was acting “responsibly” for the sake of the Syrian people, as “Western campaigns” in Afghanistan and Iraq had proved flawed. *Global Times*, a nationalistic party-owned paper, accused foreign media of “painting Syria black.” It said the Assad administration had actually guaranteed press freedom in Syria, since English-language newspapers and U.S.-based television networks such as CNN are available in Damascus. (Syria has been rated Not Free in Freedom House's *Freedom of the Press* report since its debut in 1980.) Some netizens posted comments questioning the wisdom of the veto. According to one remark that received over 2,000 “recommends” on the Netease news portal, “Everyone can see why [China] is not popular in the world, why you have the world besieging you.” However, the censorship apparatus soon intervened, and subsequent posts took a more progovernment line. Censorship was similarly applied to Sina Weibo, the popular microblogging service. A *China Media Bulletin* examination of WeiboScope Search, a database run by the University

of Hong Kong's Journalism and Media Studies Center that compiles deleted Sina Weibo posts, found various comments that had been critical of Beijing's position. These included denunciations of the Syrian crackdown, complaints that Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV had offered biased coverage of the violence, and concerns that China was simply following Russia's lead on the veto.

- **Xinhua 2/8/2012 (in Chinese): [Syria is not white, but it has been painted darker by the West](#)**
- **Global Voices 2/8/2012: [Censoring opinions on China's veto on UN resolution on Syria](#)**
- **People's Daily 2/7/2012 (in Chinese): [Why can't the UN Security Council be a rubber stamp?](#)**
- **Guardian 2/5/2012: [China defends Syria veto in People's Daily article](#)**
- **[WeiboScope Search](#)**



Media offer diverse responses to Wukan elections

State media and microblogging services reacted in a variety of ways to the first stage of village elections held in Wukan, Guangdong Province, on February 1. The villagers were choosing a committee of 11 people to oversee the election of a new village head in March. Wukan made headlines around the world in December 2011 after villagers forcibly expelled local Communist Party officials over land grabs, corruption, and the death in custody of one of their leaders. Provincial authorities ultimately intervened and agreed to allow the village to hold its own elections. On February 3, the nationalistic Communist Party-owned *Global Times* dismissed foreign media's fascination with the case, claiming that village-level elections in China already enjoyed a high degree of freedom. But a report in the Beijing-based *Legal Daily* stated that “for too long and in too many places,” the actual practice of village elections has been to “use hierarchy to replace general election.” Meanwhile, the *Beijing News* adopted an optimistic tone, with an editorial under the headline “Open and Transparent Elections Open New Chapter for Wukan.” The chief editor of the popular microblogging site Sina Weibo gave a tacit green light to discussion of the elections by posting a photograph of a polling station on his Weibo account. Searches on the service reportedly returned almost a million posts, a sharp contrast to the tight censorship of the term “Wukan” implemented in December (see CMB No. 43). Most comments were enthusiastic, with some pointing out that the polls undermined claims that rural Chinese are not ready for democracy. A blogger with more than 24,000 followers asked, “Does this not tell us that Chinese in other areas can do this too?” Despite such relatively open discussion, some restrictions were still evident. Journalists from a number of newspapers—particularly those known for investigative reporting—were allegedly barred from covering the elections in person.

- **South China Morning Post 2/5/2012: [Wukan's poll - pompous and wasteful or upholding fairness?](#)**
- **China Media Project 2/4/2012: [Wukan: Inspirational example, or old news?](#)**
- **Global Times 2/3/2012: [Western media making too much of Wukan election](#)**
- **Tea Leaf Nation 2/1/2012: [Images from Weibo: Wukan's historic election](#)**

- *Wall Street Journal* 2/1/2012: [Wukan elections the spark to set the prairie ablaze?](#)
 - International Federation of Journalists 2/8/2012: [First democratic elections held in Wukan Village, Guangdong](#)
-



Merkel visit, contacts restricted by Chinese officials

On February 3, German chancellor Angela Merkel was forced to cancel a planned visit to the newsroom of *Southern Weekend*, a Guangzhou-based paper known for outspoken reporting on corruption and other sensitive issues. The schedule of Merkel's three-day trip to China was altered to insert a meeting with a state-recognized Catholic bishop in place of the newspaper visit. An editor told *South China Morning Post* that *Southern Weekend* had managed to publish an exclusive interview with the chancellor that was conducted before her China trip, but that the newsroom visit was scuttled "under huge pressure from the authorities." In a similar incident the day before, police blocked prominent human rights lawyer Mo Shaoping from attending a dinner hosted by Merkel in Beijing. He had been invited to discuss the Chinese legal system, and Merkel expressed regret that he was prevented from meeting with her. Mo said police told him they were acting on "orders from leaders above," citing the need to maintain stability ahead of the 18th Party Congress in the fall. Editor in chief Wu Si of the magazine *Yanhuang Chunqiu*, which is read by many retired Chinese officials, was able to attend the dinner. He said there were other guests involved with economics, environmental protection, and education, but that no lawyers were present.

- *South China Morning Post* 2/4/2012: [Tight rein on who Merkel meets](#)
 - *Want Daily* 2/4/2012: [Beijing moves bishop to block as Merkel visits Guangzhou](#)
 - Associated Press 2/4/2012: [Merkel unhappy China blocked lawyer from meeting](#)
 - Reuters 2/3/2012: [China blocks rights lawyer from meeting Merkel](#)
-

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Microblog real-name rule begins to cut usage growth

After initial announcements in January that major microblogging sites like Sina and Tencent would soon require users to register with their real names, the deadline for all users to submit their identification numbers for registration has reportedly been set at March 16 (see CMB No. 44). Those who refuse will not have their accounts shuttered, but they will be unable to post new messages. The Guangzhou-based *Time Weekly* magazine reported in January that Sina would have to pay at least 2 yuan (32 cents) per person to verify identification through a government contractor, though the contractor later denied the report on its microblog account. In any case, it appears that companies such as Sina and Sohu have been verifying users' identities without such assistance by

asking them to submit their mobile telephone numbers when creating accounts. Phone purchases already require real-name registration. In a sign of the impact the new rules may have on the popularity of microblogging services, a number of prominent Chinese intellectuals have declared their abandonment of Sina Weibo, including social science professor Yu Jianrong, history professor Zhang Ming, and Peking University law professor He Weifang. Meanwhile, media reports indicate that the number of new users signing up for Sina Weibo has dropped dramatically—from around 20 million per month previously, to only 3 million over the past month. Steve Millward at Penn Olson says this could be because duplicate or automated accounts are being screened out by the real-name requirement, or because genuine users are staying away.

- *Investor's Business Daily* 1/27/2012: [Sina has less costly route to comply with China regs](#)
- *The Diplomat* 1/31/2012: [Intellectual microblog exodus?](#)
- Penn Olson 2/7/2012: [Real name deadline for China's microblogs is looming, new users already way down](#)



Hong Kong site preserves censored microblogs

As the government steps up pressure on microblogging sites to better control content, there have reportedly been more deletions of posts by users with large followings. In a new feature, the Journalism and Media Studies Center at the University of Hong Kong has begun tracking and saving Sina Weibo posts that have been deleted, creating a database called WeiboScope Search; the center's China Media Project has been highlighting particularly important examples of politically motivated censorship on its website. Among the deleted items noted over the past week are: a posting by economist Han Zhiguo (3.9 million followers) about the lack of separation between the Chinese Communist Party and state institutions; an item in which well-known playwright Ye Shaxin (120,000 followers) praises various aspects of Hong Kong's protection of civil liberties; a short post by Beijing magazine editor Tian Weihua remembering Guo Quan, a former professor who was sentenced to a long prison term for his prodemocracy activism and whose wife and son recently fled to the United States (see CMB No. [44](#)). The site also noted several examples of deleted cartoons or images, which can spread more freely than text in China because they may not be picked up by automated keyword filters. For instance, a removed post by a cartoonist with 42,000 followers seemed to argue that instead of paying attention to a conflict between prominent blogger Han Han and academic Fan Zhouzi (who accused Han Han of using ghostwriters), people should be watching issues—like arbitrary evictions, repression in Tibet, and disabled people's rights—that are more critical to Chinese society's development.

- [WeiboScope Search](#)
- China Media Project 2/2/2012: [All talk, no action](#)
- China Media Project 1/31/2012: [Thank goodness for Hong Kong](#)
- China Media Project 2/2/2012: [Remembering Guo Quan](#)
- China Media Project 2/1/2012: [Brutality and tragedy unseen](#)



Lawyer discusses online activism as justice tool

The *South China Morning Post* published a profile of Beijing-based activist lawyer Liu Xiaoyuan on February 7, describing his career as an “online crusader” since he began blogging regularly in January 2007. Speaking of his role as a legal consultant to prominent Chinese artist and blogger Ai Weiwei, Liu said, “We both care about social issues....I’m concerned with the legal aspects, while he’s concerned with the sociological aspects.” The two first crossed paths in 2008, when Liu advocated online for a young man who allegedly killed six police officers in Shanghai. As the lawyer published articles questioning flaws in the investigation, Ai created a documentary on the case. During Ai’s 81-day detention in the spring of 2011 (see CMB No. [41](#)), Liu advocated online for the artist’s release, prompting police to detain him for five days and warn him not to write articles or accept interviews from foreign media. He told *South China Morning Post* that his writings are frequently censored by the operators of microblogging services. In 2007 he filed a case against popular web portal Sohu for removing his articles, but it was rejected by the court without explanation. Liu argued that the media were the best tool available to a defense lawyer in China, given the judiciary’s lack of independence. “If a case attracts the attention of the public, there’s a higher likelihood that the court will treat the trial more seriously and fairly,” he said.

- *South China Morning Post* 2/7/2012: [Online crusader blogging for justice](#)
-



Communist Party newspaper editor joins Twitter

On January 29, three days after the U.S.-based microblogging service Twitter announced that it would begin censoring content by location (see CMB No. [45](#)), Hu Xijin, editor in chief of the Chinese Communist Party–owned newspaper *Global Times*, opened a Twitter account and began posting messages in English. Surprised users were initially skeptical of the account’s authenticity, as Twitter is still blocked in China and using the service amounts to a tacit indictment of the government’s censorship policies. That would be out of character for Hu, whose paper is known for nationalistic commentaries against Western governments and democratic ideals. Hu did not immediately address users’ questions about how he accessed Twitter, but on January 31 he tweeted, “I understand China’s current internet censorship but I support the gradual lift of it. I believe speech freedom is inevitable in China.” For the time being, though, it appears that Hu is abstaining from most information available via Twitter and using the service for output only. The sole account he is currently following is that of the *Global Times* itself.

- *Wall Street Journal* 1/30/2012: [Twitter wins new fans over censorship](#)
 - *The Diplomat* 2/4/2012: [China tries Twitter diplomacy?](#)
 - *McClatchy* 2/1/2012: [Mr. Hu Xijin joins Twitter in China](#)
 - [Hu Xijin on Twitter](#)
-



Facebook conveys doubts on future access to China

In documents filed with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in connection with its \$5 billion initial public offering (IPO) on February 1, the popular social-networking website Facebook said that it was continuing to “evaluate entering China,” where its service is currently blocked, but that the obstacles to such a move included “substantial legal and regulatory complexities” as well as competition from Chinese rivals that already comply with Chinese censorship directives (see CMB No. [45](#)). “We do not know if we will be able to find an approach to managing content and information that will be acceptable to us and to the Chinese government,” the Facebook filing said. Though Facebook had reportedly discussed a possible collaboration with the Chinese search engine giant Baidu that would allow the U.S.-based company to enter the Chinese market, the plan was apparently abandoned after the Arab Spring uprisings in early 2011, which increased Chinese authorities’ wariness of social media. Analysts also noted that Beijing would be unlikely to ease controls ahead of a leadership transition scheduled for late 2012. Internet expert Xiao Qiang of the University of California, Berkeley, has argued that from the authorities’ point of view, U.S. internet companies simply cannot be trusted to abide by Chinese government rules and will therefore be kept at bay beyond China’s “Great Firewall.”

- **Agence France-Presse 2/2/2012: [Facebook hopes to re-friend China despite censors](#)**
- **Tech World 2/2/2012: [Facebook says censorship puts China out of reach](#)**
- **Wall Street Journal 2/2/2012: [Facebook IPO: The company still has hopes for China](#)**
- **Reuters 2/6/2012: [Facebook needn’t envy life inside China firewall](#)**
- **Xiao Qiang 11/17/2011: [From ‘grass mud horse’ to ‘citizen’: A new generation emerges through China’s social media sphere](#)**



Qihoo fumes after app rejection by Apple

Beijing-based internet company Qihoo 360 Technology, best known for its antivirus software, announced on February 7 that its mobile security applications for Apple’s iPhone and iPad would be available again soon, after Apple withdrew the products from its app store on February 6. News of the removal caused Qihoo shares to drop 6 percent on the New York Stock Exchange. Without elaborating, the company said the removal was partly due to an “abnormal” pattern of user feedback, both in favor of and against its apps. Qihoo voiced suspicions that the rival Chinese web security company Kingsoft Corporation was involved in generating the negative user comments, and said it was prepared to file a lawsuit. According to *Shanghai Daily*, Qihoo was also upset at popular Chinese web portal Tencent for failing to act on its request to delete news articles about Apple’s withdrawal of its products. This is not the first time that Qihoo has faced negative attention. Last month, an investigation by New York-based Digital Due Diligence found that Qihoo had employed its widely used antivirus software to unfairly boost the market share of its web browser program, which surpassed Microsoft’s Internet Explorer in November 2011 to become the most popular browser in China. For example, Qihoo allegedly blocked other programs from becoming the default browser,

used pop-ups to inform users that Qihoo's browser was safer than Internet Explorer, and generated connectivity problems for users who uninstalled the Qihoo browser. In December 2011, independent investment analyst Rick Pearson raised serious doubts about the accuracy of evaluations of Qihoo that were performed prior to its initial public offering in March that year (see CMB Nos. [17](#) and [19](#)).

- *Businessweek* 2/7/2012: [Qihoo says mobile apps to return to Apple store this week](#)
- *Shanghai Daily* 2/8/2012: [Qihoo 360 upset over apps](#)
- Penn Olson 2/7/2012: [Apple bans Qihoo apps from iTunes app store](#)
- Digital Due Diligence 1/11/2012: [How Qihoo 360 won the browser war in China](#)
- The Street 12/15/2011: [Why I'm short Qihoo 360](#)

TIBET



Communications cut off in restive Sichuan regions

According to both Tibetan sources and state-run media, internet and mobile-telephone communications have been completely cut off in Tibetan areas of Sichuan Province amid escalating unrest (see CMB No. [45](#)). The *New York Times* has reported that three Tibetan herders set themselves on fire on February 3 in Sichuan's Seda County to protest political repression by the Chinese authorities. Also on February 3, citing interviews with local officials in Tibet, the nationalistic Communist Party-owned *Global Times* reported that internet connections and mobile-phone signals were cut off within a radius of over 50 kilometers around the region where "riots" had occurred. Woerter Tsering, a prominent writer who has been covering the situation in Tibet on her Twitter microblog, also reported on the communications blackout. The Chinese authorities have repeatedly severed communications in areas of unrest or during security crackdowns. The most notable past example took place from July 2009 to May 2010 in Xinjiang, after ethnic violence between Han Chinese and Uighurs triggered a clampdown in which hundreds of Uighurs were detained. More recently, communications were briefly cut off in the Guangdong Province village of Wukan in December 2011 after villagers revolted against the local Communist Party leadership. With foreign journalists barred from entering the Tibetan areas of Sichuan and communications cut off, it is impossible to confirm what is happening on the ground.

- *Guardian* 2/3/2012: [China cut off internet in area of Tibetan unrest](#)
- *New York Times* 2/6/2012: [Three Tibetan herders self-immolate in protest](#)
- *Herald Sun* 1/26/2012: [Phones and internet cut in Tibetan area of China](#)
- *Global Times* 2/3/2012: [Monks run amok](#)

BEYOND CHINA



CCTV opens new base for Americas in Washington

As part of the Chinese government's effort to boost its influence and improve its image abroad, state broadcaster China Central Television (CCTV) launched a new service for the Americas on February 8 (see CMB No. [44](#)). The service, with a hub in Washington and 15 bureaus in North and South America, will eventually produce four hours of programming daily. Among the initial offerings is a finance show called *Biz Asia America*, catering to American viewers with an interest in Chinese commerce. The station has hired journalists with experience in Western newsrooms, including Jim Laurie, an award-winning former correspondent who now serves as an executive consultant for the Chinese broadcaster. But given CCTV's record of closely following the Communist Party line, it remains unclear how successful it will be at attracting an American audience. Meanwhile, Beijing's municipal government announced on January 31 that a commercial entitled "Beijing Spirit" will debut soon on screens in New York City's Times Square and on American television channels, including CNN. According to the announcement, the clip aims to promote four "key components" of China's capital city, including "patriotism, innovation, tolerance and virtue." The advertisement's content appears similar to the national government's "Experience China" commercial, which appeared in Times Square in January last year (see CMB No. [6](#)).

- **Tencent News 2/1/2012 (in Chinese):** [Beijing press office hails debut of 'Beijing Spirit' ad on CNN, Times Square](#)
- **Xinhua 2/9/2012 (in Chinese):** [Homogenization of "City Spirit" strips away characteristics of different cities](#)
- **Associated Press 2/8/2012:** [Chinese state TV starts American service this week](#)
- **Wall Street Journal 2/8/2012:** [Watch: China's CCTV now broadcasting in North America](#)



Chinese fund to invest in Hollywood

Two Chinese investment groups announced on February 6 that they are creating a new private equity fund of up to \$800 million to invest in film projects, including in Hollywood. They expect the fund to make its first investment in May. Sun Redrock Investment Group founder Bruno Wu said the deal with Harvest Alternative Investment Group would finance studio movies with themes that are "roundly acceptable to Asian audiences," citing Paramount's *Mission: Impossible—Ghost Protocol* and Warner Brothers' *Sherlock Holmes* series as examples. He said another goal of the fund would be to partner with Hollywood to produce Chinese films with international appeal, observing that "big Chinese movies and stars aren't seen as widely outside China." Foreign studios' access to the Chinese market is currently restricted by an annual distribution ceiling of 20 foreign films and other barriers such as unpopular time slots and content censorship. As a result, Hollywood firms are increasingly using coproductions with Chinese partners to evade such obstacles. According to the *Hollywood Reporter*, Harvest Alternative is an arm of state-authorized Harvest Fund Management,

which was established in 1999 as part of a government strategy to develop the country's financial sector. Sun Redrock Investment is controlled by Sun Media Group, which Wu cofounded with his wife, well-known Chinese talk-show host Yang Lan.

- *Hollywood Reporter* 2/6/2012: [Hollywood to be wooed by \\$800 million Chinese media fund](#)
- *Financial Times* 2/6/2012: [Fund aims to link Hollywood films with China](#)
- Reuters 2/6/2012: [China's Sun Media, Harvest to launch \\$800 mln film fund](#)

NOTABLE ANALYSIS



Article describes online indoctrination of Chinese soldiers

In the February 3 issue of *China Brief*, the Washington-based Jamestown Foundation published an analysis by researcher Aaron Shraberg on how the Chinese military is using information and communication technologies to advance political work and soldier morale. Typically, military personnel are strictly forbidden from opening their own websites or blogs. However, because young recruits are used to getting information from the internet, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and military leadership are using various means to carry out web-based “political indoctrination” among soldiers. The strategies include revamped national security websites, virtual meet-and-greets between top officials and soldiers in remote outposts, and a microblog program geared toward helping newly enlisted members adjust to military life. According to the author, “To meet the challenges of an increasingly connected world, the CCP is not only censoring and restricting, but also using modern communications technologies to generate the degree of ideological dominance it believes necessary to effectively control its military.”

- *China Brief* 2/3/2012: [PLA puts political work online](#)

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*](#)

To subscribe or submit items, e-mail:
cmb@freedomhouse.org
For archives, go to:
[http://www.freedomhouse.org/news/
china-media-bulletin](http://www.freedomhouse.org/news/china-media-bulletin)