



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

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Headlines



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State media follow officials' lead in covering Bo Xilai's downfall

In the week leading up to the dramatic March 15 removal of Bo Xilai as the Communist Party chief of Chongqing, Chinese state media began to provide more coverage of the controversy that had surrounded the ambitious Politburo member since one of his subordinates, Wang Lijun, briefly sought refuge in a U.S. consulate in early February (see CMB No. [47](#)). Nevertheless, Chinese outlets continued to trail behind Hong Kong, foreign, and exile media, as well as the blogosphere, in their reporting. Throughout February and into early March, state-run media and Chinese officialdom were conspicuously silent on the story. On March 2, even as a spokesman for the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference—a state advisory body that was preparing to hold its annual session concurrently with a similar session of the National People's Congress (NPC), the rubber-stamp legislature—made the first official admission that Wang was under investigation, the English-language channel of state-run China Central Television turned its broadcast away to an anchor conducting an interview with a pundit. On March 6, Chongqing's mayor chose Hong Kong-based Phoenix TV for an interview in which he confirmed having traveled to the U.S. consulate in Chengdu on the night that Wang had reportedly spent there. As the NPC meeting progressed, higher-ranking officials began making statements in an apparent effort at damage control, though some analysts also saw signs of ongoing wrangling over the issue by different party factions. President Hu Jintao reportedly denounced Wang as a traitor to NPC delegates on March 8. The next

day, in a rare admission of fault by a top party official, Bo conceded at a press conference that he had been “negligent” in his supervision of Wang. Finally, at another news conference on March 14 as the NPC session ended, Premier Wen Jiabao urged Chongqing’s party committee and municipal government to seriously reflect on the Wang incident and learn lessons from it. News of Bo’s ouster came in a terse March 15 announcement via the official Xinhua news agency, which provided few details. Given the opacity of the underlying political battle, it was not immediately clear how China’s censors would handle discussion of Bo in traditional or online media in the days to come.

- *Wall Street Journal* 3/2/2012: [New details on Chongqing drama, not fit for TV](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 3/6/2012: [Chongqing mayor reveals role in drama outside U.S. consulate](#)
- *Asia Times* 3/6/2012: [Hu draws blood in Wang Lijun scandal](#)
- *New York Times* 3/9/2012: [An ambitious Chinese party chief admits his failure to oversee an aide](#)
- Xinhua 3/14/2012: [Premier Wen presses Chongqing authorities to reflect on Wang Lijun incident](#)
- *New York Times* 3/15/2012: [Party ousts Chinese regional chief, halting his rise](#)
- Xinhua 3/15/2012: [Zhang Dejiang replaces Bo Xilai as Chongqing Party chief](#)



New law regulates secret detentions

On March 8, in a decision that reflected Chinese authorities’ increasing use of incommunicado detention to silence dissent, the National People’s Congress (NPC) passed revisions to the Criminal Procedure Law that allow police to detain individuals at undisclosed locations for up to six months without charge if they are suspected of endangering national security, involvement in terrorism, or major corruption. Family members are to be notified within 24 hours that a person is in detention, but police are not required to tell them where or for what reason. Chinese authorities routinely invoke national security to punish journalists, lawyers, and online activists for speech that is critical of the government or that reveals human rights abuses. Official media like the *China Daily* focused on other amendments passed the same day that added some new rights protections in less politically sensitive cases. The difference highlights the Chinese leadership’s bifurcated attitude toward law enforcement, whereby it accepts the need for greater adherence to international standards in “ordinary” criminal cases, but allows and even encourages more arbitrary treatment of individuals whose actions are seen as threats to the Communist Party’s legitimacy or hold on power. Human rights groups and Chinese legal scholars raised concerns that the new rule on secret detention gave a veneer of legality to an existing but previously extralegal practice. Other observers, noting that the Chinese security forces routinely flout the law in politically sensitive cases, saw the legal changes as insignificant. In an ironic example, an attempt by Al-Jazeera to interview a criminal defense lawyer about the new amendments was obstructed by plainclothes police officers. Several online posts calling for a delay of the NPC vote were curbed by censors after garnering over 10,000 responses or reposts.

- CPJ 3/14/2012: [China’s new law sanctions covert detentions](#)
- *China Daily* 3/14/2012: [Human rights underlined in procedure law revision](#)

- CNN 3/14/2012: [China passes new law allowing secret detentions](#)
 - *New York Times* 3/14/2012: [Beijing expands safeguards for criminal suspects](#)
 - *China Digital Times* 3/13/2012: [Does China's new detention law matter?](#)
 - Al-Jazeera 3/8/2012: [Chatting with China's security apparatus](#)
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Death penalty TV show taken off the air

The popular Chinese television show *Interviews Before Execution*, in which the host interviewed convicts facing the death penalty, was taken off the air by Henan Province's state-owned Henan Legal Channel on March 9 after a five-year run. Communist Party officials had reportedly grown concerned about the international attention the show was beginning to receive, with a new documentary about the program set to air on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on March 12. The weekly show was frequently ranked among Henan's top 10 television programs. Though some critics and viewers found the content exploitative, the production team claimed that its aim was to serve as a warning to others, and that the host, Ding Yu, never conducted interviews in cases where the crime was in question, or without consent from a judge. Ding did not adopt a passive approach, telling one prisoner, "You're dangerous to society. You're scum." In the days before her show was taken off the air, Ding told Britain's *Daily Mail* newspaper, "Our show involves a very sensitive subject involving human rights....We have been instructed not to accept any further interviews about the programme, particularly with foreign media." The exact number of executions is a state secret, and estimates vary widely, but China is believed to put more prisoners to death annually than the rest of the world combined. The San Francisco-based Duihua Foundation has estimated that roughly 4,000 convicts were executed in 2011. China's criminal justice system lacks due process and other fundamental safeguards, and a variety of crimes other than murder carry the death penalty. Executions are often carried out within days of a sentence's confirmation.

- *New York Times* 3/6/2012: [On a new TV show in China, cue the firing squad](#)
 - BBC 3/12/2012: [China's death row TV hit: Interviews before execution](#)
 - *Daily Mail* 3/4/2012: [The Execution Factor: It was designed as propaganda to deter would-be criminals. Instead interviews on death row have become China's new TV hit](#)
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State media revive Mao-era propaganda hero

On March 5, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) commemorated the 50th anniversary of the death of Lei Feng, a legendary truck driver in the People's Liberation Army who became a centerpiece of CCP propaganda after former leader Mao Zedong praised him as a model of "patriotic sacrifice." The "Learn from Comrade Lei Feng" campaign was initiated by the party mouthpiece *People's Daily* in 1963 and has been celebrated every year since. But according to Jeremy Goldkorn of Danwei.org, the media this year promoted the campaign on a scale "not seen for decades." A CCP commission held a discussion panel on March 2 on Lei Feng that included propaganda chief Li Changchun and aimed to "open up a grand new Chinese socialist development era." A leaked directive obtained by

the *China Digital Times* allegedly ordered traditional and online media outlets to “increase the scope of Lei Feng Propaganda.” Accordingly, state broadcaster China Central Television created a special English-language website on the topic, “China Strength,” while web portal Sina organized a “Lei Feng in My Heart” online writing contest, with prizes worth up to 1,000 yuan (\$160). Some Chinese netizens commented that it was government officials, not ordinary citizens, who needed to learn from Lei Feng’s selflessness, while others circulated satirical spoofs on the campaign. One of the latter was a portrait of Lei Feng in which the face had been replaced with that of prominent Chinese artist and blogger Ai Weiwei, a vocal critic of the Chinese government. Ai denounced the campaign in an interview with a Japanese newspaper, saying that in a time of peace, “patriotism that places more importance on the state’s interests than on individual happiness, truth and life is sinful.”

- *China Digital Times* 3/6/2012: [Lei Feng: Hero for today’s China?](#)
- *China Scope* 3/2/2012: [China launched the nationwide ‘Learn from Comrade Lei Feng’ ideology campaign](#)
- *Danwei* 3/5/2012: [Lei Feng in the age of the microblog](#)
- *Yomiuri Shimbun* 3/4/2012: [Ai: China is ethically bankrupt](#)

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Microblog users punished for comments, reposting

In several cases in recent weeks, Chinese internet users have been detained for posting politically sensitive information on microblogs, or in at least one instance, for simply reposting what another person had already put online. For example, on March 7, Zhang Mingyu, a businessman and local legislator from Chongqing, was taken by police from his Beijing apartment shortly after posting a microblog comment in which he hinted that he may have information on a scandal surrounding former Chongqing police chief Wang Lijun (see above). Just a few days earlier, Zhang had reported on his microblog that a Chongqing official known for ties to organized crime had committed suicide; the death was later confirmed, though police would not indicate the cause. There were no additional reports on Zhang’s whereabouts, and his lawyers said they were unable to reach him on his mobile telephone. Separately, in Guangdong Province, an internet forum editor in Foshan is facing prosecution for reposting a message alleging that two prosecutors had been caught with prostitutes, but were released by police the next day. Colleagues of the editor, Shang Laicheng, told Radio Free Asia that he had been given time off work and that his computer had been taken by the authorities. While the veracity of the post in question remains unclear, the case points to a further escalation of the authorities’ efforts to control the circulation of “harmful information” or “rumors” on microblogs (see CMB No. [49](#)).

- *CPJ* 3/5/2012: [Online editor in China detained for reposting](#)
- *Southern Metropolis Daily* 2/29/2012 (in Chinese): [Popular blogger detained 10 days for repost alleging official caught with prostitution](#)
- *Radio Free Asia* 3/2/2012: [Editor held over sex rumor](#)

- **IFEX 3/9/2012:** [New detention law introduced; businessman harassed over blog entries](#)
 - **Sydney Morning Herald 3/8/2012:** [Chinese businessman detained before exposing crime links](#)
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Amid censorship, netizens mock congress session

The Chinese authorities tightened their grip on the media as the National People’s Congress (NPC), China’s rubber-stamp legislature, held its annual plenary session from March 5 to March 14, and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), a state advisory body, held a parallel session. On March 12, the *China Digital Times* revealed a list of reporting instructions that were allegedly sent to both traditional and online media outlets. Among other directives, reporters were told not to hype stories surrounding former Chongqing police chief Wang Lijun (see above), or to bring up CPPCC members’ suggestions on protecting freedom of speech. The media were also banned from reporting on “sudden incidents,” stories of local petitioners, food safety problems, and news related to the upcoming election of Hong Kong’s chief executive. The Central Propaganda Department reportedly told journalists not to cover web postings circulating in the Chinese blogosphere that mocked the NPC. Among them were photographs of NPC and CPPCC delegates in expensive designer clothes, compiled by reporter Zheng Wei of the Singapore-based *Straits Times* newspaper. Another popular item featured images of delegates either falling asleep or fiddling with their smartphones. Evan Osnos, writing for the *New Yorker* magazine, argued that the divergent treatments of the two sessions—by official media and by users of online social media—illustrated how China had become “a place of parallel truths: the official truth and the unofficial truth.” Despite ever-increasing censorship and criminal penalties, Chinese netizens have continued to take the risk of exposing and disseminating the “unofficial truth.”

- **China Media Project 3/9/2011:** [National People’s Congress fashion watch](#)
 - **New Yorker 3/9/2012:** [China and the unofficial truth](#)
 - **Wall Street Journal 3/9/2012:** [Photos: China’s sleepy delegates](#)
 - **China Digital Times 3/12/2012:** [Directives from the Ministry of Truth, February 6–March 7, 2012](#)
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Microblog deletions continue as real-name deadline nears

Beijing-based microblogging sites are facing a state-imposed deadline of March 16 to complete the real-name registration of their users. The popular platform Sina Weibo has reported that about 60 percent of its account holders have submitted accurate information, including their full names and mobile-telephone numbers. Users who do not register by the deadline will be blocked from posting comments, but may keep their account and follow others’ posts (see CMB No. [47](#)). Meanwhile, Weibo staff have continued to delete messages on a range of topics, particularly when they are posted by users with large followings (see CMB No. [49](#)). Two such deletions were recently highlighted by the *China Media Project* at the University of Hong Kong. One of the posts, put up on

March 9 by a law school deputy dean with 164,000 followers, showed bloodied migrant workers alongside a truck with the logo of the government's urban management personnel (*chengguan*), whose brutality in the past has sparked public protests. A March 7 post by financial magazine director Tian Weihua, who has 140,000 followers, was also deleted. It showed a renminbi bill on which someone had printed "Falun Dafa is Great!"—a reference to the persecuted Falun Gong spiritual group. In both cases, the verbal comment accompanying the photograph was vague and avoided sensitive words like "*chengguan*" or "Falun Gong" that might have triggered automated censorship, meaning they were likely removed by human monitors. The University of Hong Kong's WeiboScope database compiles deleted Weibo items, and recent searches of the trove by China Media Bulletin editors turned up a number of postings related to the March 5–14 session of the National People's Congress (NPC) or top political figures. These included messages that disclosed details of the recently amended secret detention law (see above), referred to the NPC session as "long and boring," or compared the NPC unfavorably with Taiwan's lively democratic legislature. One deleted post, by a Hangzhou-based magazine editor with about 70,000 followers, featured an image of former Chinese leader Jiang Zemin leaning over a group of computer users, with the caption, "I've come over to see whether you are criticizing me online."

- **BBC 3/12/2012: [China's Sina Weibo microblog nears identity deadline](#)**
- **[WeiboScope Search](#)**
- **China Media Project 3/6/2012: [Are you criticizing me?](#)**
- **China Media Project 3/7/2012: [Web censors not amused by Falun Gong jest](#)**
- **China Media Project 3/9/2012: [Images of urban brutality](#)**



Youku-Tudou merger to consolidate online video market

Youku, China's largest online video platform, announced on March 12 that it planned to acquire its smaller rival, Tudou, in order to better compete with the country's popular multipurpose web portals, such as Sina, Baidu, and Tencent. The new company, to be named Youku Tudou Inc., was expected to enjoy lower overall costs for licensing and transmitting content. Both Youku and Tudou had reported net losses for 2011, and they still needed to convince shareholders that the consolidation would be effective. Analysts told the *South China Morning Post* that Chinese regulators would probably approve the deal, as they tended not to oppose market consolidation. This could be because a smaller number of dominant companies facilitates implementation of censorship and content controls. Youku and Tudou already benefit from the fact that potential foreign competitors like YouTube remain officially blocked. However, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television announced in February that it planned to develop comprehensive regulations for online television content (see CMB No. [48](#)), which are bound to affect Youku Tudou's business outlook.

- ***South China Morning Post* 3/13/2012: [Rivals merge to form online video giant](#)**
- **Bloomberg 3/12/2012: [Youku to buy China online video rival Tudou in \\$1 billion stock-only deal](#)**

BEYOND CHINA



Taiwanese, mainland reporters cite cross-strait restrictions

Mainland Chinese journalists are complaining of restrictions in Taiwan, where the authorities allow only 10 mainland media outlets to operate, and each is allowed a quota of five correspondents working under single-entry, three-month visas. Mainland reporters say that the short span of the visas makes it difficult to find suitable housing, and to conduct substantive reporting. In a press conference on February 29, China's Taiwan Affairs Office spokesperson, Fan Liqing, called for permanent press offices to be set up across the Strait "as soon as possible." However, an official at Taiwan's Mainland Affairs Council (MAC), Hua Shih-chieh, said that China's tightly controlled media environment was "the core hindrance blocking cross-strait press exchanges." According to a statement issued by the Taipei-based media rights group Association of Taiwan Journalists (ATJ) on March 1, Beijing recently barred Taiwanese journalists from reporting at an international conference in Hainan Province. ATJ said that despite the participation of Taiwanese officials, reporters from Next Media Group were denied accreditation to attend the government-organized Boao Forum for Asia, an annual event to be held from March 31 to April 3. Next Media Group, which has been denied entry since the conference was first held in 2009, is owned by Hong Kong media tycoon Jimmy Lai, a vocal critic of the Chinese Communist Party and its human rights record.

- **Association of Taiwan Journalists 3/1/2012 (in Chinese): [ATJ condemns Chinese government for barring media outlet from reporting](#)**
- **Xinhua 2/29/2012: [Mainland calls for permanent press offices across Taiwan Strait](#)**
- **IFEX 3/6/2012: [IFJ urges lifting of ban on Taiwan media group at Chinese regional forum](#)**
- ***Asia Times* 3/9/2012: [Mainland journalists face oppression in Taiwan](#)**



China suspected in Facebook-based NATO spying

Britain's *Observer* newspaper reported on March 10 that acquaintances of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) supreme allied commander, U.S. admiral James Stavridis, had allegedly been targeted by cyberespionage originating in China. The spies had created a fake account for the admiral on the popular social-networking site Facebook last year, through which they lured his family members and colleagues to accept bogus "friend requests." Though it was unlikely that military information was leaked via the site, the perpetrators were able to obtain personal information such as e-mail addresses, telephone numbers, and photographs by interacting with the admiral's contacts. NATO refused to identify the security breach's country of origin, but several sources confirmed that it had been traced to China. Military officers and diplomats were also told in classified briefings that the so-called "social engineering" activities, characterized by high sophistication, pointed to "state-sponsored individuals" in China. Concern has been growing among democratic governments and international companies about the scale of China-based cyberespionage (see, inter alia, CMB Nos. [45](#) and [47](#)). The U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission released a report on March 8 on Beijing's growing hacking capabilities, finding that while the Chinese government is funding research on cyberwarfare at 50 local universities, the

U.S. government has no standard policy for responding to cyberattacks—which could result in a “catastrophic failure” of critical infrastructure.

- *Telegraph* 3/13/2012: [How spies used Facebook to steal Nato chiefs' details](#)
- *Guardian* 3/10/2012: [China suspected of Facebook attack on Nato's supreme allied commander](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 3/8/2012: [U.S. report to warn on cyberattack threat from China](#)

NOTABLE ANALYSIS



Carnegie Mellon unveils study of microblog deletions

A team of researchers at Carnegie Mellon University in Pennsylvania released what the university called the first large-scale analysis of political content censorship in social media, examining nearly 57 million postings on China’s Sina Weibo microblogging platform. The findings of the study—conducted by Languages and Technologies Institute professor Noah Smith and PhD students David Bamman and Brendan O’Connor—were published in the March issue of *First Monday*, a peer-reviewed online journal. The most commonly censored topics included the banned Falun Gong spiritual movement and prominent activists such as artist Ai Weiwei and jailed democracy advocate Liu Xiaobo. The term *lianghui* (two meetings), which referred to the concurrent sessions of the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, was also blacklisted after Chinese netizens made it a code word for “planned protest” amid online calls for prodemocracy demonstrations to emulate the Arab Spring in February 2011. In another case of specific event-related censorship, the researchers found that on July 6, shortly after the emergence of a false rumor that former Chinese leader Jiang Zemin had died, only one out of every 5,666 Sina Weibo posts mentioned Jiang’s name, whereas the name appeared in one out of every 75 posts on the uncensored Chinese-language version of Twitter, which is blocked by Chinese authorities but accessible through circumvention tools. The analysis also revealed high rates of censorship in certain provinces, with the microblog firm’s employees deleting up to 53 percent of postings made in restive areas such as Tibet. Many studies in the past have focused on the blocking of websites, but Smith said “the practice of deleting individual messages is not yet well understood.”

- Carnegie Mellon University 3/7/2012: [Carnegie Mellon performs first large-scale analysis of ‘soft’ censorship of social media in China](#)
- *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* 3/8/2012: [CMU study analyzes what China deletes](#)
- *First Monday* 3/5/2012: [Censorship and deletion practices in Chinese social media](#)
- *Washington Post* 3/9/2012: [China’s censors delete thousands of messages online — by hand](#)

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 2011*](#)

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