



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

Issue No. 51: March 22, 2012

Headlines

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-  Problems plague new real-name microblog policy
-  Microblog censors target Bo Xilai, coup rumors
-  Romney, Kerry tied to China surveillance company
-  UK book fair excludes independent Chinese authors

BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS

Media coverage cautious as congress session ends

A day before Chinese premier Wen Jiabao gave a news conference at the close of the annual session of the National People's Congress (NPC) on March 14 (see CMB No. [50](#)), the Central Propaganda Department reportedly issued a directive on coverage of his remarks to newspapers across the country. They were ordered to use only articles from the official Xinhua news agency, and informed that "extended commentaries are strictly forbidden." Ironically, Wen stressed the importance of public opinion during his appearance. He said the government should reflect on relevant netizen opinion and create conditions that allow people to criticize its work. Press coverage of the NPC session was generally very cautious, as mistakes could be punished harshly. Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* reported that the NPC delegation from Guangdong, a province known for its relatively liberal policies and for hosting the country's most enterprising media outlets, had tightly controlled its exposure to the press, and particularly to non-mainland reporters. The paper contrasted the delegation's approach with that of the somewhat more freewheeling Yunnan Province delegation, and speculated that the difference stemmed from Guangdong party chief Wang Yang's pending bid for a seat on the Politburo Standing Committee in a leadership transition this fall. In addition to press controls, the authorities have reportedly been especially vigilant this year for any sign of dissent in the period surrounding the NPC session. Recent arbitrary detentions have included that of

Jiangxi-based labor rights activist Liu Ping, who was reportedly seized upon arrival in Beijing on March 6, though she claimed she was there to find work, not petition the government.

- *New York Times* 3/19/2012: [Activist said to be missing in China](#)
 - *China Digital Times* 3/14/2012: [Ministry of Truth: reporting Wen Jiabao's speech](#)
 - *South China Morning Post* 3/15/2012: [Guangdong fails to live up to great media expectations](#)
 - *Global Times* 3/14/2012: [Chinese premier wants to discuss with critics face to face](#)
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Censorship on Ferrari crash spurs speculation

Censorship surrounding a violent Ferrari car crash that killed the young driver and badly injured two passengers in Beijing on March 18 sparked public speculation on the identity of those involved. In a number of past cases, privileged children of the wealthy and powerful have drawn public scorn for their arrogant or reckless behavior behind the wheel (see CMB No. [33](#)). The *Beijing Evening News* ran an article and photograph on the day of the accident, but a condensed version posted to the paper's microblog account, which has over 100,000 followers, was quickly removed. Other reports of censorship involving the word "Ferrari" emerged in the following days. The Beijing Public Security Bureau reportedly refused to release the identities of the driver and passengers, or details of the investigation, further fueling suspicions that they were linked to powerful individuals. Ironically, the Communist Party–owned *Global Times* newspaper was among the first to report on the secrecy, online deletions, and theories about the crash, though only in its English edition, which is read mostly by foreigners.

- *China Media Project* 3/20/2012: [Ferrari crash story off limits in China](#)
 - *Beijing Evening News* 3/20/2012 (in Chinese): [Ferrari totalled, one dead two injured](#)
 - *Global Times* 3/19/2012: [Ferrari crash information hushed up](#)
 - *Globe and Mail* 3/20/2012: [Secrecy of mysterious Ferrari crash fuels speculation in Beijing](#)
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Pro-Mao movement curtailed following Bo Xilai ouster

The Chinese government has apparently banned the "red song campaign," a movement launched in 2011 by recently purged Chongqing Communist Party chief Bo Xilai that involved the promotion of revolutionary anthems and ideals from the Mao Zedong era. Bo, an ambitious politician who had been seeking a seat on the Politburo Standing Committee, was removed from his post on March 15 after an apparent factional clash within the party (see CMB No. [50](#)). Chongqing residents said they had been unable to sing red songs in public places since his ouster. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that a city park had posted a notice saying the music was banned because it disturbed the neighborhood. According to Zheng Jianwei, a lawyer in Chongqing, several leftist groups had planned to organize a farewell rally for Bo in the city center, but internet postings related to the

event were deleted by the authorities. A few demonstrators who appeared on March 19 at a local square—with a banner reading “Chairman Bo, the people of Chongqing miss you”—were quickly dispersed by the police. Meanwhile, Maoist online forums reportedly experienced technical difficulties or were blocked (see below), and a former television host known for his Maoist views had his speaking engagements canceled. The red song campaign and other manifestations of Maoist nostalgia had reached their peak in the run-up to the 90th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party’s founding in July last year, and were closely tied to Bo’s rise to national prominence (see CMB No. [26](#)).

- *Los Angeles Times* 3/20/2012: [China puts a stop to Maoist revival](#)
- Radio Free Asia 3/19/2012: ['Red' songs banned in Chongqing](#)

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Microblog censors target Bo Xilai, coup rumor

After China’s official Xinhua news agency reported on March 15 that Bo Xilai had been removed as Chinese Communist Party (CCP) secretary of Chongqing (see CMB No. [50](#)), the news went viral on China’s popular microblogging sites, quickly becoming the top trending topic on Sina Weibo. Bo’s name and discussion of his ouster appeared largely uncensored that day and the next, with netizen reactions ranging from joy to disappointment to satire. On March 17, an internal CCP document that was leaked online confirmed that Bo’s aide, former Chongqing police chief Wang Lijun, had indeed sought political asylum at a U.S. consulate in Sichuan Province on February 6. That act had touched off a scandal that thwarted Bo’s national political ambitions and led to his downfall. The leaked document also said Wang fled because he feared retribution after informing Bo that his family was under criminal investigation for possible corruption. The saga took a new turn on March 19, when microblog postings alleged an unusually strong military police presence in downtown Beijing and suggested that there had been a coup attempt. The reports described an internal battle between the CCP’s powerful security chief, Zhou Yongkang, who is seen as aligned with Bo and former leader Jiang Zemin, and the CCP faction tied to President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao. Though the rumors were unconfirmed, they unsettled financial markets that day. By March 21, Sina and Tencent’s microblogging services had reportedly instituted a block on searches for Bo’s name and for code terms devised to circumvent such censorship. Sina was also blocking searches for Zhou’s name and the word “coup.” However, reflecting the inconsistencies of Chinese censorship, search engine Baidu returned results for Bo’s name as usual. The combination of increased censorship, lack of convincing information in traditional media, and validation of some earlier information—such as Wang’s asylum bid—that had first appeared as microblog rumors all fueled further online speculation about internal CCP politics.

- *Wall Street Journal* 3/16/2012: [Bo Xilai sets off China social media storm as deadline looms](#)

- *China Digital Times* 3/15/2012: [Netizens provide comic relief in a political earthquake](#)
 - *New York Times* 3/19/2012: [Report on ousted China official shows effort at damage control](#)
 - *Epoch Times* 3/21/2012: [Coup in Beijing, says Chinese internet rumor mill](#)
 - *Wall Street Journal* 3/21/2012: [China reins in Bo Xilai chatter online](#)
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Ai Weiwei microblog deleted after two-hour run

On March 18, prominent Chinese artist and blogger Ai Weiwei established an account on the popular Sina Weibo microblogging service, which quickly attracted more than 10,000 followers. However, after less than two hours and only one test post, the account was shut down by censors. Ai, who is widely known for his criticism of the government, said this was the first time he had succeeded in creating a Sina Weibo account, however briefly; he has long been a prolific user of the U.S.-based Twitter service, which is officially blocked in China and can be reached only with circumvention tools. His experiment on Sina came two days after the effective date of new rules requiring Beijing-based microblogging services to register users under their real names (see below). Separately, on March 13, the U.S.-based website Blocked on Weibo published a small sample of the words and terms whose search results are blocked by Sina on its microblogging service. Most pertained to minority religions or ethnicities, exile news outlets, dates associated with past protests or unrest, public health and pollution, or pornography. Although many microblog users attempt to evade or stay ahead of the censorship apparatus and discuss politically sensitive topics, the medium remains dominated by lighter fare. According to Agence France-Presse, the 10 most popular Sina Weibo accounts are owned by show business celebrities, who are each followed by over 10 million users. This is comparable to the top 10 Twitter accounts, which have similar followings and are also dominated by entertainment industry figures. Chinese actress Yao Chen has the top-ranked Sina Weibo account, with over 18 million followers.

- *Reuters* 3/20/2012: [Plug pulled on dissident artist Ai's microblog](#)
 - *Agence France-Presse* 3/20/2012: [Sina Weibo's top user hits 18 million fans as China enforces strict real-name microblogging policy](#)
 - [Blocked on Weibo](#)
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Problems plague new real-name microblog policy

The state-imposed March 16 deadline for Beijing-based microblogging sites to complete real-name registration of their users has passed. However, according to Reuters, by midday on the effective date, only 19 million of more than 300 million users of the popular platform Sina Weibo had complied. Under the regulations, those who failed to register under their real names would be unable to make new posts. Most netizens appeared pessimistic about the freedom of China's microblogosphere. "Definitely, I will not use Weibo if they need real names," said one microblogger. "I don't want to be supervised because of my words." In an indication of the potential dangers of the stricter controls, Peking University law professor He Weifang argued that microblogs addressed social problems that were not covered by China's state-controlled formal media. He said the

informal online medium served as a safety valve for Chinese people, through which they could express their opinions without taking to the streets. After the real-name deadline, a number of users with unregistered accounts reportedly found that they could still write and repost articles on their accounts if they used smartphones or tablet computers. On March 17, Tech in Asia (formerly Penn Olson) editor C. Custer said he received a message from a Sina administrator that thanked him for registering his identity, though he had never filled out any forms providing personal information. Other microbloggers reported similar experiences. It was not immediately clear whether this phenomenon reflected technical problems with Sina's implementation of the new rules, the collection of personal information without users' knowledge or permission, or an effort to artificially inflate the success rate by registering noncompliant users.

- **Tech in Asia 3/19/2012:** [More strange things on post-real-name Sina Weibo](#)
- **Reuters 3/16/2012:** [Chinese microbloggers bemoan identity disclosure rule](#)
- **Register 3/19/2012:** [China's police ignore real name rules ... so far](#)
- **Tech in Asia 3/17/2012:** [Very strange things are happening with Sina Weibo's 'real-name' registration](#)



Private firms offer web-comment deletion services

On March 15, World Consumer Rights Day, the state-run newspaper *China Daily* reported a rise in public relations firms that specialize in manipulating public opinion about their clients on the internet. Zhou Wei of Guangzhou-based PR Pioneer Network said his company relied on connections (*guanxi*) with staff at popular web portals who are responsible for removing postings, and that it can have content removed from platforms ranging from video-sharing and microblogging sites to social-networking and bulletin-board services. "Removing one post and the responses to it costs about 1,000 yuan [\$158]. If there are enormous responses and followers, we charge more," Zhou said. Liu Mingda, who runs another such public relations service, said he maintained relations with key website staff by sending gifts and money. A monthly subscription to Liu's service includes not just deletions, but the posting of positive comments to dilute any negative results that appear on search engines like Baidu. He did not explain how his company verified information provided by clients, but insisted that it did not accept cases that include unreliable information or medical disputes involving deaths. A Baidu search by *China Media Bulletin* editors for "deletion company" resulted in a long list of companies offering such services. A report published by the Communist Party paper *Legal Evening News* on March 12 said it had reached out to three professional companies and asked them to remove negative reviews of a local fish restaurant. One declined, saying it did not cover food safety issues. Another asked for 3,000 yuan per post on major web portals and 1,200 yuan on others. The third said it would be able to delete all the posts, but its price was nonnegotiable, because deletion companies usually receive higher demand on days near World Consumer Rights Day.

- **China Daily 3/15/2012:** [PR firms cash in on web comment deletion](#)
- **Tech in Asia 3/13/2012:** [On the Chinese Internet, anything can be deleted if you've got the cash](#)
- **Legal Evening News 3/12/2012 (in Chinese):** [Deletion companies say March 15 price nonnegotiable](#)

HONG KONG



Faltering chief executive hopeful turns to microblogging

Although the only voters in the March 25 election for Hong Kong's next chief executive will be a 1,200-member committee dominated by pro-Beijing political and business elites, one of the two leading candidates, Henry Tang, launched an account on the popular Chinese microblogging site Sina Weibo on March 6 in order to reach out to the broader public. On his microblog, which obtained 85,000 followers within a week, Tang made direct attacks on rival candidate Leung Chun-ying, in keeping with an election campaign that has been more contentious and bitter than previous contests. A series of personal scandals on issues including an extramarital affair and an illegal addition to his home have hurt Tang in recent polls, though Leung has faced his own difficulties, including a conflict-of-interest probe and fears that he secretly holds more hardline, pro-Beijing views than Tang. In a March 16 post, Tang apologized for the scandals, saying "I am not perfect, I did not handle personal mistakes decisively." In another post, he told his followers that he would directly answer questions on controversial social policies, unlike Leung, "who leads citizens on a roundabout walk through the park." While Hong Kong and mainland Chinese netizens were stunned by Tang's blunt writing (see CMB No. [44](#)), Leung made no posts at all on his own Weibo account. By March 22 there were signs that Beijing was shifting its tacit endorsement from Tang to Leung, with observers noting changes in coverage of the race by Hong Kong's pro-Beijing newspapers. Meanwhile, a portion of the electoral committee, including lawmakers from Hong Kong's pro-democracy parties, was reportedly planning to reject both of the main candidates and cast blank ballots.

- *Wall Street Journal* 3/20/2012: [Hong Kong candidate creates social media stir](#)
- *Associated Press* 3/22/2012: [Signs hint Beijing may be shifting on HK leader](#)
- *Reuters* 3/22/2012: [China appears to hedge bets in Hong Kong election](#)
- [Henry Tang's Weibo](#)
- [Leung Chun-ying's Weibo](#)

BEYOND CHINA



Romney, Kerry tied to China surveillance company

The *New York Times* reported on March 15 that Bain Capital, a Boston-based asset management company founded by Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney in the 1980s, has become involved in a nationwide surveillance project for the Chinese government. According to the *Washington Post*, Teresa Heinz Kerry, the wife of U.S. senator and former Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry, also apparently holds an indirect stake in the Bain investment. In December 2011, Bain Capital's Asia Fund acquired Uniview Technologies, a Zhejiang-based supplier of infrared cameras and tracking software. Uniview claims to be the top supplier for China's Safe Cities program, which involves the construction of centrally monitored camera networks that can watch

over public spaces and places like hospitals, mosques, and movie theaters. One of Uniview's previous projects was an emergency command center in Tibet used for the "maintenance of social stability," a common Communist Party euphemism for the repression of dissent. Though Romney has had no role in Bain's operations since 1999, and holds his Bain assets through a blind trust, the firm's decision to invest in Uniview raises broader questions about U.S. companies' attempts to profit from the China's booming surveillance industry (see CMB No. [32](#)), as the technology is frequently used to monitor dissidents and identify protesters for arrest, especially in Tibet and Xinjiang. Notably, the Bain fund purchased Uniview from a larger Chinese technology company that had itself been acquired by Hewlett-Packard in 2010. The United States prohibits the export of crime-control products to China in light of its human rights record, but multipurpose systems that can also be used for benign functions like traffic control are allowed, and Bain's activity—purchasing a Chinese supplier rather than exporting products to China—does not appear to conflict with these regulations.

- *New York Times* 3/15/2012: [Firm Romney founded is tied to Chinese surveillance](#)
 - *Washington Post* 3/16/2012: [John Kerry tied to controversial Bain Capital investment](#)
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UK book fair excludes independent Chinese authors

Organizers of the 41st annual London Book Fair (LBF), scheduled to be held from April 16 to 18, have been accused by exiled Chinese poet Bei Ling of excluding Chinese authors who are not part of China's official delegation. Falling on the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Britain, the event will include a special program on China, featuring multiple forums and cultural exhibitions. Bei Ling, who leads the literary rights group Independent Chinese PEN Centre, told the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) that he was shocked by the event line-up and its exclusion of independent voices. "Also shocking is the London Book Fair's cooperation with the GAPP [General Administration of Press and Publication]—the very ministry that's responsible for censorship" of print media in China. He said exiled writers such as Liao Yiwu—who fled China in 2011 after being barred from traveling to literary events overseas (see CMB No. [33](#))—or Nobel literature laureate Gao Xingjian should be invited to the fair, which is set to include 180 Chinese publishers and 21 authors. In a departure from past practice, the English chapter of PEN said this year it would only host one author from the official Chinese delegation in its area of the fair, because it did not want to endorse the narrow official list of writers. The Chinese government frequently attempts to interfere with overseas cultural events that include participants it finds politically objectionable (see CMB No. [7](#)). Bei Ling was himself at the center of such efforts in 2009, when the Chinese government pressured the Frankfurt Book Fair to exclude him from a panel.

- BBC 3/20/2012: [London Book Fair: Row over China delegates](#)
 - *China Daily* 3/8/2012: [Chinese publishers, writers to be featured at London Book Fair](#)
 - *Far Eastern Economic Review* 10/12/2009: [China's export of censorship](#)
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NOTABLE ANALYSIS



Study reports year of repression for China's rights defenders

On March 9, the rights group Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD) released its annual report, documenting the situation of human rights defenders (HRDs) in China in 2011. According to the report, which was based in part on surveys of activists inside China, 52 percent of the HRDs who took legal action against the government to seek redress for rights violations during the year said their cases were not accepted by the courts. Sixty percent reported harassment or retaliation after filing lawsuits. The report also highlighted the authorities' extensive and increasing use of extralegal detention, enforced disappearance, torture, and prison sentences of up to 10 years against human rights activists, lawyers, and outspoken intellectuals. CHRD documented 3,833 cases of arbitrary detention of HRDs during 2011, of which some 86 percent were apparently held without any basis in Chinese law. The forms of such extralegal detention included informal "black jails," enforced travel, and confinement in psychiatric institutions.

- **Chinese Human Rights Defenders 3/9/2012: [‘We can dig a pit and bury you alive’: Annual report on the situation of human rights defenders in China, 2011](#)**

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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