



# CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

Issue No. 62: June 28, 2012

## Top Headlines

-  False data hide severity of China's economic troubles
-  Forced abortion stirs netizen outcry, husband missing after interview
-  Netizen sues after Bo Xilai joke costs him year in labor camp
-  Hong Kong editor's performance fuels press freedom concerns
-  U.S. Congress considers Chinese media visa caps

## BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS



### **Regulator announces campaign to fight 'news extortion'**

On June 21, the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT), China's regulator for broadcast media, announced on its website that it was launching a three-month campaign to "combat news extortion and clean up paid-for news," and had notified local broadcast authorities on June 13. The notice states that the effort is aimed at improving the reporting environment in advance of the 18th Communist Party Congress scheduled for later this year. It includes a long list of measures supposedly intended to curb "red envelope" journalism, embedded marketing, and extortion in news gathering, but also calls for strengthening "ideological education" and "propaganda discipline" among journalists. Indeed, as David Bandurski of the Hong Kong-based China Media Project points out, while corruption has become a serious problem in China's commercialized media environment (see CMB No. [61](#)), "some of the chief causes are institutional" rather than ethical, because news and propaganda controls create perverse incentives that reward fabrication while punishing professional reporting. Moreover, past campaigns to combat "fake news" or other ethical violations have often resulted in restrictions on legitimate news reporting and

punishment of respected investigative journalists, suggesting that the goal is to protect the Communist Party's monopoly on news manipulation rather than to ensure media quality and independence. For example, in December 2009, Fu Hua of *China Business News* was sentenced to three years in prison for allegedly accepting bribes in relation to a story exposing safety problems in the construction of an airport in northeastern China.

- **China Media Project 6/21/2012:** [China purges media corruption ahead of key congress](#)
  - **SARFT 6/20/2012 (in Chinese):** [Notice on the carrying out of a special campaign to 'combat news extortion and clean up paid-for news'](#)
  - ***Freedom of the Press 2010:*** [China](#)
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## **False data hide severity of China's economic troubles**

The *New York Times* reported on June 22 that China's local and provincial officials have been falsifying statistics to conceal the depth of the country's economic slowdown, citing several prominent corporate executives in China and foreign economists (see CMB No. [61](#)). Some firms have allegedly been told to keep separate sets of books to show fictitious business growth. Manipulation has also affected indicators like electricity production, consumption, and tax receipts. Electricity data in particular are often used by observers as reputedly more reliable measurements of economic activity than the official, macro-level reports, which are seen as distorted. Together, the manipulations have allegedly inflated a variety of economic readings by up to 2 percentage points. The issue is crucial not just for the weak global economy, in which China has stood out with its strong reported growth in recent years, but also for the Communist regime, whose legitimacy rests largely on its ability to deliver ever-growing prosperity. This year's sharp slowdown in China's economic growth has cast a shadow on a sensitive party leadership change scheduled for the fall. With a host of personnel decisions in the offing, many local and provincial officials have an especially strong incentive to report positive economic performance in their jurisdictions. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) denied that its statistics were overstated, saying the claims cited by the *Times* were "not rooted in evidence." However, the *Beijing News* reported in April that NBS director Ma Jiantang had publicly and repeatedly called for a crackdown on data manipulation. The bureau had apparently found that local governments frequently altered company data before they turned in finalized figures to Beijing. Speaking at a national conference on statistical management on June 19, Ma vowed again to ensure the "authenticity, accuracy, integrity and timeliness" of NBS data through tightened auditing by inspection teams.

- ***New York Times* 6/22/2012:** [Chinese data mask depth of slowdown, executives say](#)
  - **Xinhua 6/19/2012:** [China's top statistician vows to ensure data authenticity](#)
  - ***Want Daily* 4/10/2012:** [False data China's 'biggest source of corruption': statistics chief](#)
  - ***Beijing News* 4/16/2012 (in Chinese):** [NBS director Ma Jiantang: Data manipulation is the 'worst type of corruption'](#)
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## Harassment of cultural figures continues

The following are recent cases in which Chinese writers and artists were harassed or detained by the authorities:

- **Artist:** Police on June 21 lifted strict bail conditions imposed on prominent artist and blogger Ai Weiwei in mid-2011, after his release from 81 days of arbitrary detention. However, they told him that he was still suspected of offenses including pornography, bigamy, and illicit exchange of foreign currency, and would therefore be barred from traveling. The allegations are among several that the authorities have used to threaten Ai since his detention, though only a claim of tax evasion has actually been pursued to date. The dissident artist's studio company is currently contesting a tax penalty of 15 million yuan (\$2.4 million) (see CMB No. [61](#)). Ai said that when he asked how long the investigation of the other possible charges might take, he was told that it would continue for "as long as they want it, it could be years."
  - **Artist/Photographer:** Beijing-based artist Hua Yong was detained near Tiananmen Square on June 4 for "creating a disturbance," after he began a performance piece to commemorate the anniversary of the 1989 crackdown on prodemocracy protests (see CMB No. [60](#)). According to Chinese Human Rights Defenders, a photographer named Guo Zhenming was also taken from the scene, and his whereabouts remain unknown. Hua had been held in administrative detention for 15 days in 2011 for another performance related to June 4.
  - **Blogger:** Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications law lecturer Xu Zhiyong was detained on June 7 after he published a blog entry on May 29 entitled "China's New Civil Movement," calling on individual citizens to uphold the principles of democracy and justice. Xu then recounted details of his detention on his blog after his release the next day. He said police had covered his head with a black cloth and took him to a hotel room on the outskirts of Beijing, where he was threatened and interrogated, but refused to answer questions or sign documents. Xu has been harassed and temporarily detained on multiple occasions in the past.
  - **Poet:** New York-based literary rights group PEN International on June 20 called for the release of dissident novelist and poet Li Bifeng, who was detained in Mianyang, Sichuan Province, in September 2011 for alleged economic crimes, but has yet to be charged. Prominent exile writer Liao Yiwu has strongly refuted the authorities' reported suspicions that Li had funded his escape from China in July 2011 (see CMB No. [33](#)).
- IFEX 6/21/2012: [Fears for dissident writer Li Bifeng](#)
  - Reuters 6/21/2012: [China's Ai Weiwei threatened with bigamy, pornography charges](#)
  - CHRD 6/19/2012: [China human rights briefing](#)
  - *China Digital Times* 6/20/2012: [Xu Zhiyong: An account of my recent disappearance](#)

## NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



### **Forced abortion stirs netizen outcry, husband missing after interview**

Chinese netizens have expressed outrage over a case of compulsory abortion after photographs showing the bedridden mother with her dead fetus were posted on the internet. The woman, Feng Jianmei, was forced by local authorities in Zhenping County, Shaanxi Province, to abort her seven-month pregnancy on June 2, because she could not afford the 40,000 yuan (\$6,300) fine for a second child under the country's one-child policy (see CMB No. 49). In response to the scandal, the official Xinhua news agency reported on June 26 that two officials had been fired and five more received "warnings," as an investigation had found that Feng's rights were violated. Earlier reports said the family had received \$785 in compensation from the local mayor. Chinese microbloggers reacted angrily to the punishments. One said, "Seven people get administrative sanctions.... I thought they were going to shoot several to death for murder." Feng's husband, Deng Jiyuan, went missing on June 24, two days after the family gave an interview to the German magazine *Stern*. After the forced abortion, Deng had created a microblog account to publicize the family's ordeal, and was later followed, harassed, and beaten as he sought to travel to Beijing for television and online video interviews. Also on June 24, a group of protesters—allegedly hired or organized by local officials—appeared outside the hospital where Feng was staying, with banners that called her family "traitors," presumably for speaking to various foreign media.

- Agence France-Presse 6/26/2012: [Husband in China forced abortion 'missing': family](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 6/26/2012: [Forced-abortion case husband goes missing](#)
- *China Digital Times* 6/25/2012: [Forced abortion victim and family branded traitors](#)
- *Washington Post* 6/15/2012: [Forced abortion in China prompts outrage, calls for reform](#)
- Agence France-Presse 6/27/2012: [Outrage at 'soft' penalties in abortion case](#)



### **Microblog deletions target social, political topics**

The University of Hong Kong's China Media Project regularly compiles postings that censors have removed from the microblogging platform Sina Weibo. The following are among those deleted recently for addressing sensitive topics such as the household registration system, official corruption, and political reform:

- **Migrants:** A repost by literature critic and poet Ye Kuangzheng (141,000 followers) on the rights of internal migrants was deleted on June 27. The original post, by a less prominent user, read, "Chinese people have the right to move freely on their own home soil. Beijing is a city belonging to China, and I've been admitted here [for work], so a school desk should be provided for my child. It is right and unalterable for children to live with their parents!" China's household registration system is known for its strict limits on citizens' ability to

change their permanent place of residence. Unregistered migrants are not eligible for health care benefits or education for their children, among other services.

- **Corruption:** A post by Harbin writer Sun Yaoyang (84,000 followers) about six Chinese government officials who had been convicted on corruption charges was removed on June 25. Sun listed the names and sprawling personal assets of all six officials, along with a photograph of each.
  - **Authoritarianism:** A post by user Zatan Wuwei (10,000 followers) that consisted largely of a quotation from popular state-television anchorwoman Chai Jing on the durability of democracy and the inevitable collapse of authoritarian regimes was deleted on June 22. The quotation argues that authoritarian systems lack accountability and self-corrective mechanisms, though it does not identify the Chinese government as the target of criticism. On June 4, censors removed a post by blogger Zha Liangjun (13,000 followers) that obliquely suggested the futility of authoritarian repression, asking, “Do all of you really believe that by plucking off every flower petal you can keep Spring from coming?”
  - **Police:** A post in which *Korea Times* reporter Sunny Lee (10,000 followers) shared photos of dissident artist and blogger Ai Weiwei posing comically in a too-tight Chinese police uniform was deleted on June 22. Another post that harmed the image of Chinese police was removed from former *Southern Weekend* magazine reporter Guan Jun’s microblog (52,000 followers) on June 18. Guan’s entry showed photos from an incident in Heilongjiang Province in which an angry crowd surrounded several local officers who were allegedly assaulting a motorcyclist for not carrying his license.
- **China Media Project 6/27/2012:** [Free movement and urban rights](#)
  - **China Media Project 6/26/2012:** [Post with stunning corruption figures deleted](#)
  - **China Media Project 6/22/2012:** [Democracy quote by Chai Jing deleted from Weibo](#)
  - **China Media Project 6/4/2012:** [If every petal is plucked, can Spring be stopped?](#)
  - **China Media Project 6/22/2012:** [Post of Ai Weiwei in cop uniform deleted from Weibo](#)
  - **China Media Project 6/19/2012:** [Posts on alleged riot against police deleted from Weibo](#)



## Netizens rebuke Shanghai Metro for sexual harassment advice

The Shanghai Metro turned its official Sina Weibo microblog into a platform for debate on gender rights on June 20, when it posted a photograph of a female passenger in a diaphanous black dress and admonished female riders to dress more modestly if they wanted to avoid sexual harassment on the subway during the summer. The post quickly drew criticism from netizens. “What I wear is my basic right,” wrote one blogger. Others said it was the Metro’s responsibility to ensure the safety of passengers, regardless of how they chose to dress. One internet user questioned, “So according to your theory, it is okay that every man in the swimming pool takes liberties with women?” Besides the flurry of online comments, two women staged a protest on Shanghai subway trains, wearing signs that read, “I can be slutty, but you can’t get dirty” and “I want coolness, not sexual predators.”

However, many users were more supportive of the Metro's remarks. According to an online poll conducted by Sina Weibo on June 25, about 70 percent of respondents agreed that women should dress in a "self-protective manner."

- **BBC 6/26/2012: [Shanghai Metro 'dress code' warning sparks debate](#)**
- **China Daily 6/26/2012: [Women protest against subway's dress code](#)**
- **South China Morning Post 6/26/2012: [Dress code gets a dressing down](#)**
- **Ministry of Tofu 6/26/2012: [Shanghai metro blames sexual harassment on women's immodest clothing; netizens' reaction](#)**



### **Netizen sues after Bo Xilai joke costs him year in labor camp**

A former civil servant from Chongqing who served a year in a "reeducation through labor" camp after mocking then Chongqing party secretary Bo Xilai in an April 2011 microblog post has filed an administrative lawsuit seeking compensation (see CMB No. [24](#)). A hearing of the case is scheduled for June 29. Because Bo was purged from the Politburo earlier this year, Fang may be hoping that a judge in China's politicized court system will be inclined to rule in his favor. Separately, as new information has emerged regarding the Communist Party and criminal investigations into Bo and his associates—including reports from Japanese media that Bo's wife has confessed to the murder of British businessman Neil Heywood, and the possible involvement of a Frenchman in Cambodia—online portals have continued to censor discussion of the topic (see CMB No. [54](#)). Tests by *China Media Bulletin* editors found that searches on the microblogging service Sina Weibo for the names of the case's principal figures and even the city name Chongqing returned a message saying that results were not available. Interestingly, queries of Bo's name on the popular search engine Baidu and the state-run search engine Panguoso returned top results that referenced his ouster and rumors of a sexual relationship with actress Zhang Ziyi, but not the allegations that his wife, and perhaps he, was involved in Heywood's death. By comparison, a similar search in Chinese on Google's Hong Kong-based search engine returned top results related to Heywood.

- **Epoch Times 6/27/2012: [Joking Chinese netizen files lawsuit following one year forced labor](#)**
- **Canyu.org 6/25/2012 (in Chinese): [Chongqing Fang lawsuit to be tried on 29](#)**
- **Radio Free Asia 6/22/2012: [Bo scandal reaches Cambodia](#)**
- **BBC 6/22/2012: Bo Xilai scandal: [Cambodia holds on to French architect](#)**
- **Asahi Shimbun 6/22/2012: [Investigators say Bo Xilai's wife admits to killing Briton](#)**

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## **HONG KONG**



### **Editor's performance fuels broader press freedom concerns**

Wang Xiangwei, who was named editor in chief of the Hong Kong newspaper *South China Morning Post* earlier this year, has defended himself against accusations that he censored the paper's June 7

coverage of the suspicious death of Chinese dissident Li Wangyang, telling the *Wall Street Journal* that his paper's "excellent record in human rights reporting" contradicted such claims (see CMB No. [61](#)). However, the *Journal* pointed out on June 25 that most of the *Post's* past award-winning articles on Chinese human rights issues were written by Paul Mooney, who left the paper in May after Wang refused to renew his contract. According to Mooney and several other former reporters, Wang routinely rejected proposed stories that would reflect poorly on Chinese authorities, and many of those that were ultimately published during Wang's tenure as head of the paper's China desk had gone through other departments. He was also accused of informing officials about stories that the paper planned to cover, though he denied those assertions. The complaints against Wang come amid broader concerns about the fate of press freedom in Hong Kong. In a Hong Kong Journalists Association poll published on June 24, about 87 percent of the 663 journalists surveyed said the territory's press freedom had deteriorated in the past seven years under chief executive Donald Tsang Yam-kuen, a 28.5 percent increase compared with a similar survey in 2007. Of those who felt freedom had declined, about 92 percent attributed the change to tighter government control over information and news reporting, followed by self-censorship in the industry (71 percent), interference from Beijing (67.5 percent), and pressure from the business sector (35.9 percent). In a separate development, Hong Kong lawmaker Audrey Eu Yuet-mee's account on the Chinese microblogging service Sina Weibo was shut down on June 25, after she encouraged her readers to participate in a protest rally on July 1—timed to coincide with a visit by Chinese leader Hu Jintao, the new Hong Kong chief executive's inauguration ceremony (see CMB No. [52](#)), and the anniversary of Hong Kong's handover to China.

- *Wall Street Journal* 6/25/2012: [The censor at Hong Kong's post](#)
- *Ming Pao* 6/25/2012 (in Chinese): [87% of journalists: Decline in press freedom since Tsang became chief executive](#)
- HKJA 6/24/2012: [Survey: Government manipulation eroded press freedom](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 6/26/2012: [Lawmaker's microblog muzzled](#)

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## BEYOND CHINA



### Observers mull ongoing Chinese media expansion abroad

In a June 25 analysis article, Mark MacKinnon, the Beijing bureau chief for Canada's *Globe and Mail* newspaper, highlighted China's leading role in the current "seismic shift" in the global media scene, as established independent outlets from democratic countries in Europe and North America face financial strains, and well-funded, state-backed competitors from China and other authoritarian countries expand rapidly (see CMB No. [58](#)). MacKinnon first observed the phenomenon in the Middle East a few years ago, when local English-language newspapers started to rely more on China's state news agency, Xinhua, which offers less costly services than the Associated Press or Reuters. More recently, a well-known blogger reported that state-run *China Daily* was the only English-language paper available at his hotel in Milan, Italy. Xinhua touted its deepening ties to the Italian media industry earlier this month. Even in their own pages, cash-strapped North American and European newspapers are running paid supplements from *China Daily*. In an interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) released June 18, Elizabeth Economy of the Council on Foreign Relations suggested that the explosion of Chinese media was meant to counter what Beijing

considered a dominant “Western perspective” on China in the media. However, Asia researcher Sarah Cook of Freedom House told the BBC that the Chinese outlets are expected to follow the Communist Party’s censorship and propaganda directives, leaving little room for independent reporting. The danger, according to MacKinnon, is not that one cultural perspective is now being balanced by another, but that state-controlled authoritarian mouthpieces are replacing media whose reporting is based on traditions of independence and objectivity.

- *Globe and Mail* 6/25/2012: [As Western media contract, the China Daily expands](#)
- BBC 6/18/2012: [Chinese media’s US expansion](#)
- *China Daily* 6/8/2012: [Time has come for Italy to attract more Chinese investment](#)



## Confucius Institutes face ethical concerns in Britain, Canada

Chinese ambassador to Britain Liu Xiaoming has accused critics of Confucius Institutes of “cold war thinking,” arguing that China’s state-backed overseas education facilities promote mutual understanding and friendship while providing language and cultural training (see CMB No. 59). Liu’s remarks—at a June 6–8 gathering in Edinburgh of the network’s European branches that was attended by Scottish premier Alex Salmond—came after prominent China expert Christopher Hughes of the London School of Economics raised ethical concerns about hosting the institutes in light of a recent scandal over his school’s ties to the regime of former Libyan leader Mu’ammar al-Qadhafi. Hughes told the *Guardian*, “I think the evidence is overwhelming that the Confucius Institute does not measure up [to the new ethics code], because it is openly declared to be a propaganda organisation by the Chinese government, which has a poor record on human rights, and local institutes are subservient to the [headquarters] in Beijing.” On June 10, Hughes sent colleagues a link to an animated video on a Confucius Institute website that gave young learners a heavily distorted summary of the Korean War. The video, entitled “The War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea,” was deleted on June 11, but formed part of a larger series of Chinese history lessons. On June 20, Canada’s *Globe and Mail* newspaper described how Sonia Zhao, a former Confucius Institute instructor at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, was forced to hide her spiritual belief in Falun Gong, which is persecuted in China and banned under the institutes’ teaching contract. Zhao said she was told not to talk about a variety of sensitive topics in the classroom, including Tibet. She eventually resigned and sought political asylum in Canada.

- *China Digital Times* 6/20/2012: [Controversy continues over Confucius Institutes](#)
- *Epoch Times* 6/27/2012: [Chinese history according to the Confucius Institute](#)
- *Guardian* 6/15/2012: [Chinese ambassador attacks ‘cold war’ fears over Confucius Institutes](#)
- *Global Times* 6/20/2012: [Confucius Institutes benefit US economy, culture](#)
- YouTube 6/19/2012: [The war to resist US aggression and aid Korea](#)



## U.S. Congress considers Chinese media visa caps

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) on June 21 expressed concern over

the development of the draft Chinese Media Reciprocity Act, which was under discussion on June 20 before the Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration Policy and Enforcement in the U.S. House of Representatives (see CMB No. [40](#)). The bill aims to limit U.S. press visas for Chinese journalists at 13 state-run news outlets—including Xinhua News Agency, China Central Television, *China Daily*, and *Global Times*—in order to pressure Beijing into allowing more than the current two reporters from the U.S. government-funded Voice of America to work in China. However, CPJ said journalists should be allowed to work and move freely in all countries, and questioned the wisdom of fighting restrictions with restrictions. According to subcommittee testimony by the Heritage Foundation’s Nick Zahn, the U.S. State Department approved 868 visas for Chinese state journalists in 2011, whereas Beijing denied applications beyond the two-visa quota for Voice of America, and barred Radio Free Asia, another U.S. government-funded outlet, from staffing a bureau in China. Zahn also noted that China’s overseas investment in state media stood at between \$6 billion and \$7 billion, whereas the U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors had requested just \$720 million for fiscal year 2013.

- IFEX 6/22/2012: [US urged not to punish Chinese restrictions with more restrictions](#)
- Heritage Foundation 6/25/2012: [China and public diplomacy: Chinese media reciprocity act of 2011](#)
- Govtracks 9/12/2011: [H.R. 2899: Chinese Media Reciprocity Act of 2011](#)

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## NOTABLE ANALYSIS



### Documentary film profiles citizen journalists in China

New York–based director Stephen Maing’s documentary *High Tech, Low Life*, which was screened at Sheffield Doc/Fest in England on June 16 despite protests from the Chinese embassy (see CMB No. [61](#)), explores the rise of citizen journalism in China. The film follows two prominent bloggers, Zhou Shuguang and Zhang Shihe. Neither of them received formal training in journalism, but their postings on stories that were censored by state-run news outlets generated a large readership online. While Zhou, better known as Zola, adopts a sensational approach to reporting on social issues such as migrant workers and forced evictions, Zhang, nicknamed Tiger Temple, methodically documents the complaints of ordinary citizens. Both protagonists were harassed during the filming of the documentary. Zola was barred from traveling to Germany to attend a bloggers’ conference, while Tiger Temple was ordered to leave Beijing during a national Communist Party gathering. When asked if his film would arrive in China, Maing said, “I have no doubt it will be pirated, and that’s not a situation I’m unhappy with.”

- *Wired* 6/20/2012: [‘High Tech, Low Life’ reveals China's growing citizen blogger army](#)
- [High Tech, Low Life](#)
- Bureau of Investigative Journalism 6/21/2012: [Chinese whispers: Citizen journalism behind the Great Firewall](#)