



CHINA MEDIA BULLETIN

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

Issue No. 75: November 29, 2012 Headlines

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PHOTO OF THE WEEK: HI, HANDSOME!



Credit: People's Daily Online

BROADCAST / PRINT MEDIA NEWS



New leaders of censorship apparatus named, dimming hopes for opening

As the second tier of Communist Party appointments were made public in the wake of the November 8–14 party congress (see CMB No. [74](#)), the state-run Xinhua news agency announced on November 21 that Liu Qibao had been named to head the party's propaganda department. He replaces Liu Yunshan, who had risen to become one of the seven members of the all-powerful Politburo Standing Committee. The promotion of the two officials, and Liu Yunshan's ranking as fifth in the Politburo hierarchy (the same as his predecessor, Li Changchun), dampened hopes that the new batch of leaders might take a more liberal approach to censorship. Several journalists, netizens, and grassroots activists told foreign and Hong Kong media that they saw the appointments as an "ominous sign," expressing fears that the generally conservative new leadership might institute even harsher media and internet controls. Though it is difficult to confirm their precise roles, both Liu Qibao and Liu Yunshan have been cited in connection with high-profile cover-ups in the past. Liu Yunshan, who headed the party's propaganda department for the past decade, is said to have been behind the initial news blackout surrounding the 2011 Wenzhou train crash (see CMB No. [66](#)), among other censorship directives issued regularly by the department. Liu Qibao, who has been the party secretary of Sichuan Province since 2007, presided over restrictions on reports of shoddy school construction that increased the death toll of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake (see CMB No. [22](#)), the imprisonment of activists who conducted their own earthquake-related investigations, and communications lockdowns in the province's Tibetan regions amid a series of self-immolation protests (see below).

- **Reuters 11/21/2012:** [China promotes conservative to propaganda minister](#)
- **NTDTV 11/23/2012:** [Sichuan quake to haunt new propaganda chief Liu Qibao](#)
- **Central News Agency 11/18/2012:** [China propaganda head's rise into core leadership worries netizens](#)
- **South China Morning Post 11/17/2012:** [Elevation of Liu Yunshan heightens censorship fears](#)



Censors curb news on top officials, Xi's wife, and financial cases

- On November 21, the Central Propaganda Department "strictly" ordered news outlets to use only the official Xinhua news agency's articles for coverage of Chinese premier **Wen Jiabao's foreign travel** and recent "high-level personnel changes." It also instructed them not to publish stories about Liu Qibao, the newly appointed head of the propaganda department (see above), and told print media not to run images with any stories on a Chongqing official who was recently involved in a sex scandal (see below).
- Peng Liyuan, **wife of the new Communist Party leader Xi Jinping** and one of China's most recognizable folk singers, has kept a low profile in state media despite her status as China's incoming first lady. She is rarely seen in public with Xi, and there have been very few articles on their relationship. A rare exception was an interview that was published online in 2006—reportedly without approval from central authorities. While most postings of the article have

been removed by censors, *China Media Bulletin* editors found that a copy was still available on a local web portal based in Guangxi Province.

- According to *China Digital Times*, Guangdong Province's Propaganda Department issued a notice on November 22 that prohibited all news outlets from reporting on the **bankruptcy** of Jia Yue Group, a real estate conglomerate based in Zhanjiang City. On November 23, the department issued additional reporting bans on a financial audit of Haizhou Village, as well as a petition for government information submitted by a local scientist. In a separate order, Guangdong authorities instructed reporters to follow official statements and downplay a clash between local police forces and several men from Xinjiang.
- *Washington Post* 11/10/2012: [For China's next first lady, a lowered profile](#)
- Qingzhou 360 5/1/2006 (in Chinese): [Peng Liyuan talks about marriage and how to be Xi Jinping's soulmate](#)
- *China Digital Times* 11/26/2012: [Ministry of Truth: Vulgar video, explosions, and more](#)
- *China Digital Times* 11/26/2012: [Ministry of Truth: Bankruptcy and more](#)



Elton John dedicates Beijing concert to dissident artist Ai Weiwei

British pop icon Elton John shocked his Beijing audience of 12,000 on November 25 when he declared that the concert was dedicated “to the spirit and talent” of prominent Chinese artist and blogger Ai Weiwei (see CMB No. [73](#)). The crowd reportedly murmured with surprise or confusion at the mention of the celebrity dissident, who attended the concert with his son. Ai later told Hong Kong's *South China Morning Post* that he was deeply touched by the gesture, because his name and work have been suppressed in China's public domain. He said John had sent a message to the Chinese authorities that “people's hearts and minds belong to freedom,” and “no one can refuse people the joy and love for art.” In a commentary published on November 28, the Communist Party-controlled newspaper *Global Times* criticized the singer for being “disrespectful” to the audience and the contract he had signed, and for forcibly adding political content to the concert. The paper suggested that such a “provocateur” should be booed off the stage. However, searches by *China Media Bulletin* editors found some support for John's action on the popular Chinese microblogging platform Sina Weibo, with one netizen writing, “Elton John should have mentioned more names.” Live shows in China are required to submit detailed information, such as song titles and cast lists, for prior government approval. The Icelandic singer Bjork was banned from China after she shouted “Tibet” while singing a song called “Declare Independence” during a performance in Shanghai in 2008.

- *Associated Press* 11/26/2012: [Elton John dedicates Beijing show to dissident](#)
- *South China Morning Post* 11/27/2012: [Ai Weiwei 'deeply touched' by Elton John's concert dedication](#)
- *Global Times* 11/28/2012: [Elton John's outburst met with indifference](#)

NEW MEDIA / TECHNOLOGY NEWS



Chongqing official fired over online sex video

Lei Zhengfu, a district party official in Chongqing, was sacked on November 23 after a video recording of him having sex with an 18-year-old woman was posted online on November 20. The video, reportedly shot in 2007, was first released by Beijing-based veteran journalist Zhu Ruifeng on his “jdwsy.com” watchdog website, which is registered in Hong Kong. Zhu told the Associated Press that the woman, who was initially identified by netizens as Lei’s mistress, was hired by a construction company seeking government contracts. The company later attempted to use the video to extort more business, Zhu said. In 2009, Lei reportedly took the matter to then Chongqing Communist Party chief Bo Xilai and his police chief, Wang Lijun, leading to a one-year prison sentence for the head of the company and 30 days of detention for the woman in the video. Zhu claimed that he was also given sex videos of several other officials, including four who were still in office. State media praised the exposure of the case, saying it indicated that the “internet is worth being embraced by the country’s corruption busters as a close ally.” However, the authorities sent out a media directive on November 22, urging reporters to moderate coverage of the story and “use authoritative sources,” a euphemism for state-run news agencies (see above). Since Bo’s downfall, the government has appeared relatively tolerant of reports of wrongdoing in Chongqing during his tenure; Bo himself was accused of improper sexual activities when he was handed over for criminal prosecution in September (see below, CMB No. 70).

- **Associated Press 11/27/2012:** [Lei Zhengfu sex tape scandal leads to Chinese official’s firing](#)
- **Time 11/26/2012:** [Communist party officials gone wild: Sex-tape scandal rocks China](#)
- **Ministry of Tofu 11/25/2012:** [Sex tape official sacked; mistress was offered as a bribe; Wang Lijun, Bo Xilai involved?](#)
- **South China Morning Post 11/25/2012:** [Chongqing sex tape scandal linked to Wang Lijun](#)



Journalist detained for report on neglected boys’ deaths

A freelance journalist was forced to board a plane in Bijie, Guizhou Province, and taken to an unidentified location on November 21, four days after he posted an online article about the death of five boys in the city. The report had stirred netizen fury over the Chinese government’s inadequate care for migrant workers’ families. The journalist, Li Yuanlong, had once worked at the city newspaper *Bijie Daily*, but broke the story of the boys’ deaths on the popular Chinese online discussion forum KDnet on November 17, with postings that described the victims, cousins aged 9 to 13, who had apparently been left with little adult supervision after two of their three fathers went to work elsewhere in China. According to Li, the boys were found dead of carbon monoxide poisoning in a large trash bin early on November 16, having lit a fire to warm themselves overnight. According to the *China Digital Times*, a November 20 media directive from the Central Propaganda Department urged news outlets not to dispatch journalists to the scene or put the story on the front page. Li’s son told the *Wall Street Journal* that the authorities had forced his parents to leave the city

for a supervised “vacation.” A message posted on Li’s KDnet account on November 22 explained cryptically, “Our family just has some urgent business to attend to, so I had to take off for a couple days.” Photographs of the trash bin posted by Li circulated among Chinese netizens, who drew parallels to the Hans Christian Andersen story “The Little Match Girl,” in which a poor girl dies from exposure while selling matches in the cold. The tale had once been included in Chinese school textbooks to illustrate the suffering of poor people in capitalist countries. A microblogger who traveled to Bijie to investigate the story said there was an increased police presence. At least eight officials were reportedly disciplined amid calls for the dismissal of Zhang Jiyong, the city’s Communist Party chief.

- *Australian* 11/24/2012: [China runaway reporter forced on plane](#)
- *Epoch Times* 11/25/2012: [After boys die in dumpster, Chinese censors descend](#)
- *China Digital Times* 11/21/2012: [Ministry of Truth: Death of runaways in Guizhou](#)
- Radio Free Asia 11/22/2012: [Child deaths reporter held](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 11/23/2012: [Forced ‘vacation’ for man who broke dumpster death story](#)
- KDnet 11/17/2012 (in Chinese): [Five homeless children died of suffocation in trash bin, incident occurred in Bijie, Guizhou](#)



Cable industry consolidation planned, new set-top service nixed

According to a November 15 article on the popular Chinese news portal Sina Tech, the State Council on October 25 approved the establishment of the China Broadcast Network, which would seek to consolidate existing regional cable companies and provide a range of telecommunications services. It would be supervised by the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television (SARFT) and generously funded by the Ministry of Finance. The move was seen as part of official efforts to integrate China’s internet, cable television, and telephone services, also known as the “three-network convergence.” It is unclear when the company would be officially registered. Despite the fact that all of them are state owned, the article said the new entity would help break the “monopoly” of China Mobile, China Telecom, and China Unicom in the Chinese telecommunications industry. Separately, Beijing-based smartphone manufacturer Xiaomi said in a statement on November 22 that it would suspend services for its set-top Xiaomi Box indefinitely. The device, which delivered online video content directly to users’ televisions, was made available on November 14. A report by Sina Tech said the suspension was related to a pending investigation by SARFT. According to the article, Xiaomi had been violating state regulations that limit set-top service to seven approved providers, and would have to partner with one of those companies to deliver content legally.

- *Economic Observer* 11/26/2012: [State Council approves new state-owned telco](#)
- Sina Tech 11/15/2012 (in Chinese): [SARFT internet company to be established, China Mobile not to invest](#)
- Tech in Asia 12/15/2012: [China establishes state-run telecom internet company](#)
- Sina Tech 11/23/2012 (in Chinese): [Xiaomi moment of truth: SARFT to invest on set-top box](#)
- ZDNet 11/22/2012: [Xiaomi’s video service suspended indefinitely](#)
- Tech in Asia 11/23/2012: [How and why Xiaomi ran afoul of China’s media regulator](#)



Critical netizen, dissident poet detained; Chongqing ex-official released

- Former village official Ren Jianyu was released from a “reeducation through labor” (RTL) camp in Chongqing’s Pengshui County on November 19, having served 15 months of his two-year sentence for posting **online criticism of the “red song campaign,”** a movement initiated by purged Chongqing party chief Bo Xilai that involved the promotion of revolutionary anthems from the Mao Zedong era. In the days after the release, state media ran articles and commentaries that questioned the RTL system’s legitimacy, its effects on free speech, and its potential misuse as a form of retaliation. However, Ren’s complaint against the local RTL committee, filed in August, was dropped on November 20 by a Chongqing court, which said that the case had “passed the statutory prosecution deadline.” Other RTL victims from Chongqing have won early releases in recent months, apparently in connection with Bo’s fall from power (see CMB No. [68](#)).
- Zhai Xiaobing, an investment banker in Beijing, was detained by police on November 7 on suspicion of spreading false terrorist information, after he **poked fun at the Chinese leadership** ahead of the November 8–14 Communist Party Congress. On November 5, Zhai had written a microblog post that imagined the party leadership at the center of a new film in the teen horror franchise Final Destination, with seven people—a reference to the new seven-member Politburo Standing Committee—surviving a disaster at the Great Hall of the People, only to die one by one under uncanny circumstances. Netizens launched an online petition calling for Zhai’s release. It remained unclear how police identified him, as his message was posted under a pseudonym on Twitter, a U.S.-based service that is blocked in China and can only be accessed using circumvention tools. Chinese authorities were vigilant for any threats or signs of disorder in the period surrounding the party congress (see CMB No. [74](#)).
- On November 19, a court in Sichuan Province sentenced **dissident Chinese poet Li Bifeng** to 12 years in prison for “contract fraud.” Li’s wife said the authorities had made “groundless” charges against him regarding a sales agreement that he had signed with a real estate company. Li, who was previously imprisoned for five years due to his involvement in the 1989 Tiananmen Square democracy movement, had been detained in September 2011. He was reportedly suspected of financing dissident writer Liao Yiwu’s escape to Germany in July of that year—an allegation Liao has denied (see CMB No. [62](#)).
- **China Media Project 11/22/2012:** [Labor re-education system under fire](#)
- **Global Times 11/22/2012:** [Re-education victim vows to continue campaign](#)
- **Time 11/21/2012:** No laughing matter: [Parody tweet leads to a detention in China](#)
- **BBC 11/21/2012:** [Online protests after Chinese Twitter user arrested](#)
- **Associated Press 11/19/2012:** [China: Dissident poet jailed for 12 years](#)



Humorless party mouthpiece duped by U.S. satire on Kim Jong-un

On November 27, the online version of the Communist Party mouthpiece *People’s Daily* earnestly hailed a spoof article in which the U.S.-based satirical newspaper the *Onion* declared North Korean

leader Kim Jong-un to be the “Sexiest Man Alive for 2012.” Apparently unaware of the *Onion*’s sarcasm, and perhaps overly accustomed to swallowing outlandish propaganda, People’s Daily Online coupled its report with a celebratory 55-image slideshow of the dictator, quoting from the original article, “With his devastatingly handsome, round face, his boyish charm, and his strong, sturdy frame, this Pyongyang-bred heartthrob is every woman’s dream come true.” Speaking to the Associated Press, an editor with the South Korean unit of People’s Daily Online said his colleagues “have realized” that the *Onion* piece was satirical, but declined to clarify whether they knew this earlier, when they first spotted the “news” on the website of the state-run *Guangming Daily*. Searches by *China Media Bulletin* editors found that both the English- and Chinese-language versions of the report had been removed from People’s Daily Online by November 28.

- *New York Times* 11/27/2012: [Something missing in Chinese newspaper’s entirely accurate summary of Onion report](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 11/27/2012: [People’s Daily quotes the Onion: Kim Jong Eun ‘sexiest man alive’](#)
- *Washington Post* 11/27/2012: [Kim Jong Eun as ‘sexiest man alive’? Chinese news site falls for an Onion story on the supreme leader](#)
- Associated Press 11/28/2012: [China’s party paper falls for Onion joke about Kim](#)



Number of mobile web users soars to nearly 400 million

A report released by the official China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) on November 16 indicated that mobile telephones have surpassed desktop computers as the most common way for Chinese users to access the web (see CMB No. [70](#)). The report, entitled *China Mobile Internet User Behavior Research 2012*, found that there were at least 388 million mobile internet users as of June 2012, amounting to 72.2 percent of the country’s entire netizen population. According to the study, mobile internet users are characterized by their “fixed” online habits at “fragmented” hours. More than 40 percent of them browse the internet while waiting in line or using public transportation. Instead of bedtime reading, an increasing number of people are surfing the web on their mobile phones before going to sleep. The report attributed the trend to the emergence of affordable smartphones, which “sharply lowered the threshold for using the devices and encouraged average mobile phone users to become mobile web surfers.” The growing number of mobile internet users has led to the appearance of mobile-phone literature, which has allowed Chinese readers to avoid state censorship that is more strictly applied in traditional book formats.

- CNNIC 11/16/2012 (in Chinese): [China mobile internet user behavior research 2012](#)
- *The Next Web* 11/19/2012: [Mobile web overtakes desktops in China as over 50% of new internet users come from rural areas](#)
- *Atlantic* 11/27/2012: [In China, 25 million people use only their cell phones to read books](#)

TIBET



Students protest anti-Tibetan booklet, more self-immolations reported

Four more Tibetans set themselves on fire to protest Chinese rule on November 25–26, as police broke up a student demonstration over an official publication that sharply ridiculed both the study of the Tibetan language and the recent wave of self-immolations. The first of the four cases involved a 17-year-old nun in Qinghai Province who died of her injuries. The other three occurred on November 26—two in Gansu Province and the third in Sichuan Province. At least two of the young men in those cases also died. Separately, students at Qinghai’s Tsolho Medical Institute launched their protest on November 26 in response to a booklet distributed by Chinese authorities at local schools. According to Radio Free Asia, the booklet, entitled *10 Real Views of Tsolho Area*, described the study of the Tibetan language as “devoid of relevance.” At least 20 of the protesters, who called for “equality of nationalities and freedom of languages,” were hospitalized after being beaten by police. In a blog post on November 18, prominent Tibetan blogger Woesser collected letters and recorded testimonials from 18 of the 79 Tibetans who had committed self-immolation between February 2009 and that date (see CMB No. [74](#)). Tingzin, a herdsman who died on November 7 in Qinghai, wrote to her father, “Being a Tibetan is so difficult. We can’t even say our prayer to Dalai Lama’s portrait. We have no freedom at all.”

- **Global Voices 11/23/2012:** [China: Last words of 19 Tibetans who committed self-immolation](#)
- **Radio Free Asia 11/26/2012:** [Four Tibetans self-immolate](#)
- **Woesser’s blog 11/16/2012 (in Chinese):** [18 Tibetans left wills and testimonials and two Tibetans self-immolated yesterday, bringing total number to 79](#)

BEYOND CHINA



Taiwan consortium seals Next Media purchase amid protests

A controversial deal to sell the Taiwan assets of Next Media Group, owned by Hong Kong media mogul Jimmy Lai, to a consortium of Taiwanese businessmen was completed late on November 27 at a hotel in Macau (see CMB No. [74](#)). Lai agreed to sell his print and television outlets in Taiwan to a group led by financier Jeffrey Koo Jr. and Want Want China Broadband chairman Tsai Shao-tsung, the son of pro-Beijing Taiwanese tycoon Tsai Eng-meng. In the presence of dozens of riot police, about 200 media activists and students protested earlier in the day outside government offices in Taipei. They raised concerns that the NT\$17.5 billion (US\$600 million) deal would have a negative effect on press freedom and increase ownership concentration, as Tsai Eng-meng already owns the China Times Group and won conditional approval in July for his company’s purchase of the country’s second-largest cable provider. According to an expert quoted by the *Wall Street Journal*, the elder Tsai would gain control over more than 50 percent of the domestic newspaper market if the new deal is approved by the Taiwanese government. A local business magazine had revealed his involvement in the Next Media purchase in early November, reporting that the tycoon had provided

the bulk of the investment but was told to keep a low profile to avoid public and regulatory scrutiny. Prominent political scientist Lo Chih-cheng said that because both Tsai and Koo have extensive business interests in China, Next Media could be expected to shift from its fiercely independent reporting under Lai and engage in self-censorship on politically sensitive topics.

- *South China Morning Post* 11/27/2012: [Next Media looks to future after sale](#)
- *Wall Street Journal* 11/28/2012: [Next Media secures sale of Taiwan media](#)
- Agence France-Presse 11/28/2012: [Next Media to sell Taiwan units despite China fears](#)
- Associated Press 11/27/2012: [Taiwan media deal sparks protests over pro-China buyer](#)

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

[*Freedom on the Net 2012*](#)
[*Freedom of the World 2012*](#)
[*Freedom of the Press 2011*](#)

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