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<http://www.rsf.org/chine-beijing-tries-to-suppress-13-04-2012,42243.html>

Asia - China

Comment ban

Beijing tries to suppress information about politically-charged affair

13 April 2012

Ever since the purge of the leading politician Bo Xilai, who has just been removed from the Communist Party Central Committee and Politburo, Beijing has been reinforcing online censorship in a bid to suppress discussion of the subject.

The latest terms to be added to the list of banned Internet keywords include not only "investigation" and "political struggle" but also the words ["tomato" and "hotpot"](#) – "bo" and "xi" in Mandarin – which are being used together online to make coded allusions to Bo Xilai.

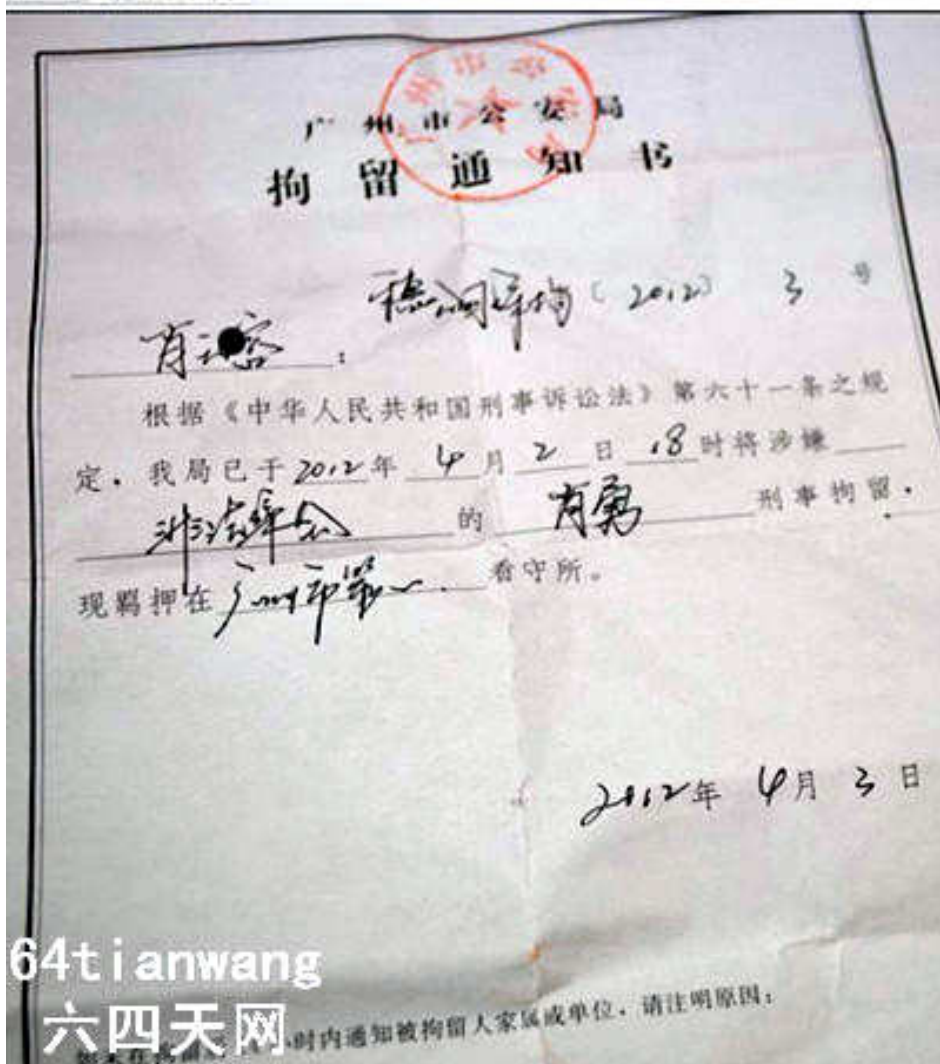
Reporters Without Borders condemns the active cooperation that Chinese Internet companies such as the Baidu search engine are giving the regime's censorship policies. The official news agency Xinhua [reported](#) on 10 April that Baidu, Sina and Tencent had undertaken to "resolutely support and cooperate with relevant government departments in measures to fight and clear up online rumours."

Xinhua added that they would also "earnestly fulfil their responsibility to society, follow the law, increase management of the Internet and adopt effective measures" against rumours. More than [210,000 microblog posts](#) have been removed since mid-March.

The main Chinese microblog services, Sina Weibo and Tencent QQ, were censored from 1 to 3 April, when many users found that the comments posted by others in their accounts had been removed. In a related development, the Sina Weibo account of Liu Xiaoyuan (刘晓原), the artist Ai Weiwei's lawyer, has not been accessible since the evening of 11 April.

The authorities asked Sina to block Liu's account for three days because of "inappropriate content." According to Liu, it was because he referred to the Bo Xilai affair. He received a message from Sina saying, "We ask you not to post this kind of information or else you will lose the right to a Weibo account."

Reporters Without Borders has learned that [Xiao Yong \(肖勇\)](#), a cyber-activist specializing in corruption issues, was arrested in Guangzhou on 2 April for posting photos on social networks of a 31 March demonstration at which human rights activists demanded more government transparency and called on senior politicians to publicly disclose their assets.



The official reason for his arrest by the police, who confiscated his computer, was his participation in this "illegal" demonstration. According to confidential sources, he is being held in Beijing. As the case has been classified as a "state secret," he cannot be represented by a lawyer. Xiao has been the target of court summonses, arrests and other forms of harassment in the past.

A Beijing court announced on 10 April that two activists who were arrested in early 2011 for criticizing forced evictions on social networks and providing legal aid to victims – **Ni Yulan (倪玉兰)** and her husband **Dong Jiqin (董继勤)** – have been sentenced to 32 and 24 months in prisons respectively on charges of fraud and disturbing public order. Ni is permanently handicapped as a result of being mistreated during an earlier spell in prison in 2002.

In neither Xiao's case nor Ni and Dong's were defence rights respected. The trials were held behind closed doors, the details of the charges were kept secret and the defendants were not represented by lawyers – all of which constitute procedural violations under Chinese law. Reporters Without Borders calls for the immediate and unconditional release of Xiao, Ni and Dong and the quashing of their convictions.

A [petition](#) for Xiao's release circulating on Twitter has so far received few signatures. US-based human rights activist Ge Xun (葛洵) blames this on the Chinese government's Internet censorship.

The European Union has called for the release of Ni and Dong, and the [French foreign ministry](#) has expressed deep concern about the case.

3rd April 2012 - AUTHORITIES LIFT MICROBLOG RESTRICTION BUT STILL HAVE INTERNET COMMENTS IN THEIR SIGHTS

Reporters Without Borders deploras the three-day ban on posting comments on other people's accounts in the two main Chinese microblogging services, Sina Weibo et Tencent QQ, which was finally lifted today. The authorities had imposed the ban on 31 March ostensibly to combat "harmful rumours."

The media freedom organization is disturbed by this kind of restriction, which is indicative of the government's feverish concern about the information circulating on the Internet in China, and is liable to be reimposed the next time an overly sensitive subject is widely discussed online.

The microblog comments ban was part of a large-scale operation launched by the authorities in Beijing in a bid to suppress online rumours of a coup d'état in the wake of the charismatic politician Bo Xilai's dismissal as secretary of the Communist Party committee in the southwestern city of Chongqing on 15 March.

The official New China agency reported that six people were arrested on the night of 30 March for "fabricating and spreading false online rumours" and 16 websites were closed.

Li Delin (李德林), a financial reporter for the magazine [Capital Week \(证券市场周刊\)](#) who has been missing since 23 March, was arrested for the same reason, according to *Radio Free Asia*. Describing the situation in Beijing on his Weibo microblog on 19 March, Li wrote: "There are lots of military vehicles, Chang'an Street is under constant control. You can see lots of plainclothes policemen at all the intersections and there are even metal barriers in some places" » ("军车如林，长安街不断管制。每个路口还有多名便衣，有的路口还拉了铁栅栏。").

The authorities are stepping up the pressure on microblogs as the number of users is growing fast and is currently put at about 300 million. The latest example is [a drive to end anonymous blogging](#). Since 16 March, anyone wanting to start a microblog is supposed to provide their real name and phone number and those already registered have been told they will be unable to continue blogging if they do not provide the required information.

Last November, Sina and Tencent undertook to [implement government directives on online surveillance](#) and to combat pornography, fraud and the dissemination of rumours and false information online. A few months before that, microblog sites had to hire moderators in order to be better equipped to implement directives from government censors.

[China](#) has one of the world's most sophisticated systems of Internet censorship and surveillance and is on the Reporters Without Borders list of "[Enemies of the Internet](#)."
