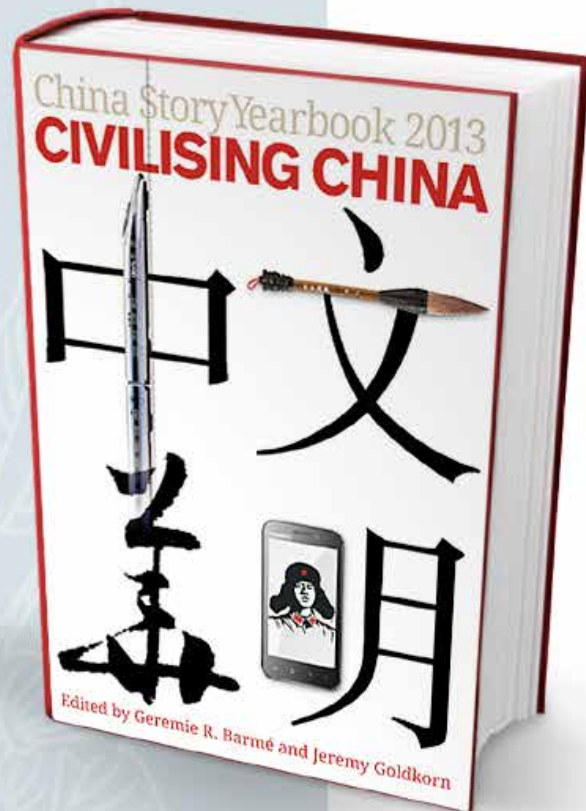


The China Story



China Story Yearbook  
*is available online:*  
[www.TheChinaStory.org](http://www.TheChinaStory.org)



## FORUM

### SPOKEN AND UNSPOKEN

Excerpt from

*CHINA STORY YEARBOOK 2013*

**CIVILISING CHINA**

文明中华

EDITED BY

Geremie R. Barmé AND Jeremy Goldkorn

中 全球研究中心  
AUSTRALIAN CENTRE ON  
CHINA IN THE WORLD



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Canberra, Australia

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ISBN 978-0-9873655-3-8

First published in October 2013  
THIS BOOK IS NOT FOR SALE

Published by:  
Australian Centre on China in the World  
The Australian National University

Art direction, typesetting and illustration by Markuz Wernli  
Printed by Union Offset Printers, Canberra, Australia

The Australian Centre on China in the World is an initiative of the Commonwealth Government of Australia and The Australian National University

As China becomes wealthier and more confident on the global stage, it also expects to be respected and accommodated as a major global force — and as a formidable civilisation. Through a survey and analysis of China's regional posture, urban change, social activism and law, mores, the Internet, history and thought — in which the concept of 'civilising' plays a prominent role — *China Story Yearbook 2013* offers insights into the country today and its dreams for the future.



Chinese football fans, Guiyang, June 2011.  
Source: ImagineChina



8月

7月

6月

5月

4月

3月

2月

2013年1月

12月

11月

10月

9月

8月

7月

6月

5月

## FORUM

SPOKEN  
AND  
UNSPOKEN

## SPOKEN AND UNSPOKEN

An Open Letter to a Nameless Censor

· MURONG XUECUN

The *Global Times* in Retrospect

Microbloggers, Conversations and Memes

## AN OPEN LETTER TO A NAMELESS CENSOR

Murong Xuecun

*Hao Qun, winner of the 2010 People's Literature Prize (Renmin wenxue jiang 人民文学奖), is the author of five novels that explore government corruption and popular disillusionment written under the pen name Murong Xuecun. He once claimed a total of 8.5 million followers of his four microblog accounts, hosted respectively on Sina, Tencent, Netease and Sohu. On 11 May 2013, all four accounts suddenly disappeared. No official explanation was given.*



**Murong Xuecun.**  
Source:  
cn.hujiang.com

*Murong, who has earned a reputation as one of China's foremost critics of censorship, speculated that a post mocking the 'Seven Things That Should Not be Discussed' (qige buyao jiang 七个不要讲, also known as qige buzhen jiang 七个不准讲, see page 118), was the likely cause. In his post he said:*

*No discussion of universal values. No discussion of a Free Press. No discussion of civil society, past mistakes of the Communist Party, capitalist cronies, or judicial independence. Really, one sentence says it all: No discussion of being civilised.*

不准讲普世价值、不准讲新闻自由、不准讲公民社会、不准讲公民权利、不准讲党的历史错误、不准讲权贵资产阶级、不准讲司法独立。概括起来其实就是一句话：不准讲文明。

*Deprived of his habitual platforms, Murong wrote an open letter to the un-named censor who silenced him, and published it on the Chinese section of the New York Times website on 20 May 2013. The translation reproduced below was uploaded to Scribd.com by an anonymous Internet user. Minor stylistic modifications have been made to the translation.*

## Dear Nameless Censor,

ON 11 MAY 2013, you ordered the termination of all my microblogs on Sina Weibo, Tencent, Sohu and NetEase, deleting every single entry I ever posted. On 17 May, in the afternoon, you ordered the reinstatement of all my microblogs, but a few hours later, in the early hours of 18 May, you ordered my accounts be shut down again. You have been unpredictable from the very beginning. To date, I have received no explanation or notification about what happened to my microblog accounts. I do not know your name, which organisation you work for, or even if you are a man or a woman, but I do know you will read this letter.

To you, I am just another microblogger whose accounts can be deleted at any time. But for me, those four microblogging accounts have become a part of my life, the place where I meet with my family and friends. In this virtual space, we greet each other, share thoughts, and sometimes exchange jokes. These microblogs are also my most important platform to communicate with more than 8.5 million followers. Over the past three years, I posted about 200,000 characters, with each post limited to 140 characters and every word was chosen with painstaking care. These posts were notes on books I have read, my thoughts about life, commentaries on current affairs, and flashes of inspiration. These microblog entries, should not have been deleted because not a single word violated any law or threatened anyone's safety.

Dear Nameless Censor, perhaps you will never understand that to a writer, the words he writes are more important to him than his life. On the evening of 11 May, my words accumulated over the years in these blogs disappeared because of a single command from you.

I am sure there are reasons for your action. But no matter what the reasons might be, I hope you will honestly tell me what they are and apologise to me for what you did.

Dear Nameless Censor, I know you possess enormous power but you have no right to delete what I write, and you have no right to intrude into my life. Most importantly, you have no right to deprive me of my freedom of speech, because freedom of speech is my inviolable constitutional right. I know that in this country, at this time, you are far more powerful than me – I am merely an ordinary citizen, a writer who writes for a living, while you, a nameless censor, have the power to push me off a cliff with just one phone call. Still, I am writing you this letter because I believe your awesome powers are only temporary. You can delete my words, you can delete my name, but you cannot snatch the pen from my hand. In the years to come this pen of mine will

fight a long war of resistance, and continue to write for as long as it takes for me to see the light of a new dawn. I believe you will not be able to hide in the shadows forever because the light of a new dawn will also expose the place where you are hiding.

Dear Nameless Censor, when that time comes, the whole world will know who you are.

For far too long, you and your colleagues have devoted all your efforts to suppressing freedom of speech in China. You have created a never-ending list of sensitive words, deleted countless articles, and closed down thousands of microblog accounts. You have constructed the Great Firewall of China and kept the rest of the world at bay behind a wall of ignorance, turning China into an information prison. You censor articles and delete words. You treat literature as poison, free speech as a crime, and independent thinkers as your enemy. Thanks to your efforts, this great nation of 1.3 billion people does not have a single newspaper that can express objective views, nor a single TV station that broadcasts objective programs, or even the smallest space where people can speak freely. This is your legacy, dear Nameless Cen-

sor. If this were a war, then standing in front of your gun is not just me. You are also making yourself the enemy of our beautiful language, our nation's future and the progress of mankind.

Perhaps you believe you are standing on the moral high ground, and believe what you are doing is for the sake of national security and a harmonious society. I hope, however, you can understand the following: China doesn't just belong to you and the organisation you work for. This nation is home for 1.3 billion Chinese people. Therefore, China's national security must guarantee that all people in this nation are free of fear, not just the few who are in

power. True stability is based on the happiness and freedom of the people and not derived from obedience enforced down the barrel of a gun. True harmony is a raucous affair, not silence enforced by clutching at people's throats. The power you have been given is supposed to protect the freedom of your people, not take that freedom away. Your responsibility is to help our language flourish, not kill it.

One day in the future you may defend what you have done by saying: I knew it was wrong but I had to execute my duty. Maybe this is a mitigating factor but you will not be exempted from moral responsibility. Among the blog entries you deleted, there was this:

If you were a guard patrolling the Berlin Wall in East Germany, when you saw someone trying to climb over the wall, your responsibility was to aim your gun slightly higher than you were trained to do; if you were a guard patrolling a village in China in 1960 during the great famine, when you saw a group of starved countrymen trying to flee the village, your responsibility was to turn a blind eye and let them go; if you were a city management officer whose job is patrolling the streets to ensure they are free of unlicensed vendors, when you are ordered to chase vendors who are only trying to earn a humble living, your responsibility is to run slower. When your normal duty becomes a crime, then high above your duty there is a loftier principle that we all must respect: our conscience as a member of humanity.

I now dedicate these words to you, dear Nameless Censor. I hope that the next time you are on patrol for sensitive words you will aim your gun slightly higher and run a little slower because of your conscience as a member of humanity.

Or perhaps you will say, I did not actively do evil but I had to follow orders. This is not an acceptable excuse, dear Nameless Censor. You are

an adult – you have eyes that see, ears that hear and a brain that can think. You are supporting these orders from above by following them. If you know these orders are wrong, then please tell me why do you support them? Clearly, what you are doing is solely to protect your own power and status and you will not stop. I have suffered because of you but please tell me, how many more people have to be sacrificed to serve your personal interests? Please look closely at these names:

Ran Yunfei, writer, scholar  
Zhang Xuezhong, professor of law  
Xiao Xuehui, professor of ethics  
Song Shinan, scholar  
He Bing, professor of law  
Si Weijiang, renowned lawyer  
Shen Yachuan, veteran journalist  
Xiang Xiaokai, scholar  
Wu Wei, scholar  
Wu Zuolai, scholar  
Teng Biao, renowned lawyer, scholar.

Over a period of just a few days, these people's Weibo accounts have also vanished at the end of your gun muzzle. This is your legacy, dear Nameless

Censor. Please look at the list again, put your hand on your heart and tell me, and tell yourself and the whole world, what crimes these people have committed. Why did you censor their

works and blacklist their names? What legal procedure did you follow and which criteria were violated to provoke you to cock your gun? Which article of the law was broken to oblige you to pull the trigger?

You of course know that people fear being shot in the dark. Each deletion is a victory for you and you are by now probably accustomed to the silence of your victims. This silence encourages you to be more determined and more brutal. However, this is not your victory because in the mist of this silence, millions of people are raging, resisting, and cursing and a huge storm is brewing. I hope that from this day hence you will receive a letter like this one every time you delete someone's writings. I hope that when you finally retire from your position these letters, piled up like a mountain, will burden you for the rest of your life.

Dear Nameless Censor, this burden will be your legacy too.

I am fully aware this letter will cause me nothing but grief: I may not be able to publish my writings in China, my words may be expunged and deleted, and my future path may become even more difficult, but I must tell you: I once had fear, but from now on, I am no longer afraid. I will be here waiting for sunlight to brighten the world, to brighten people's hearts, and light up the place where you hide. That is the difference between you and me, dear Nameless Censor – I believe in the future, while all you have is the present.

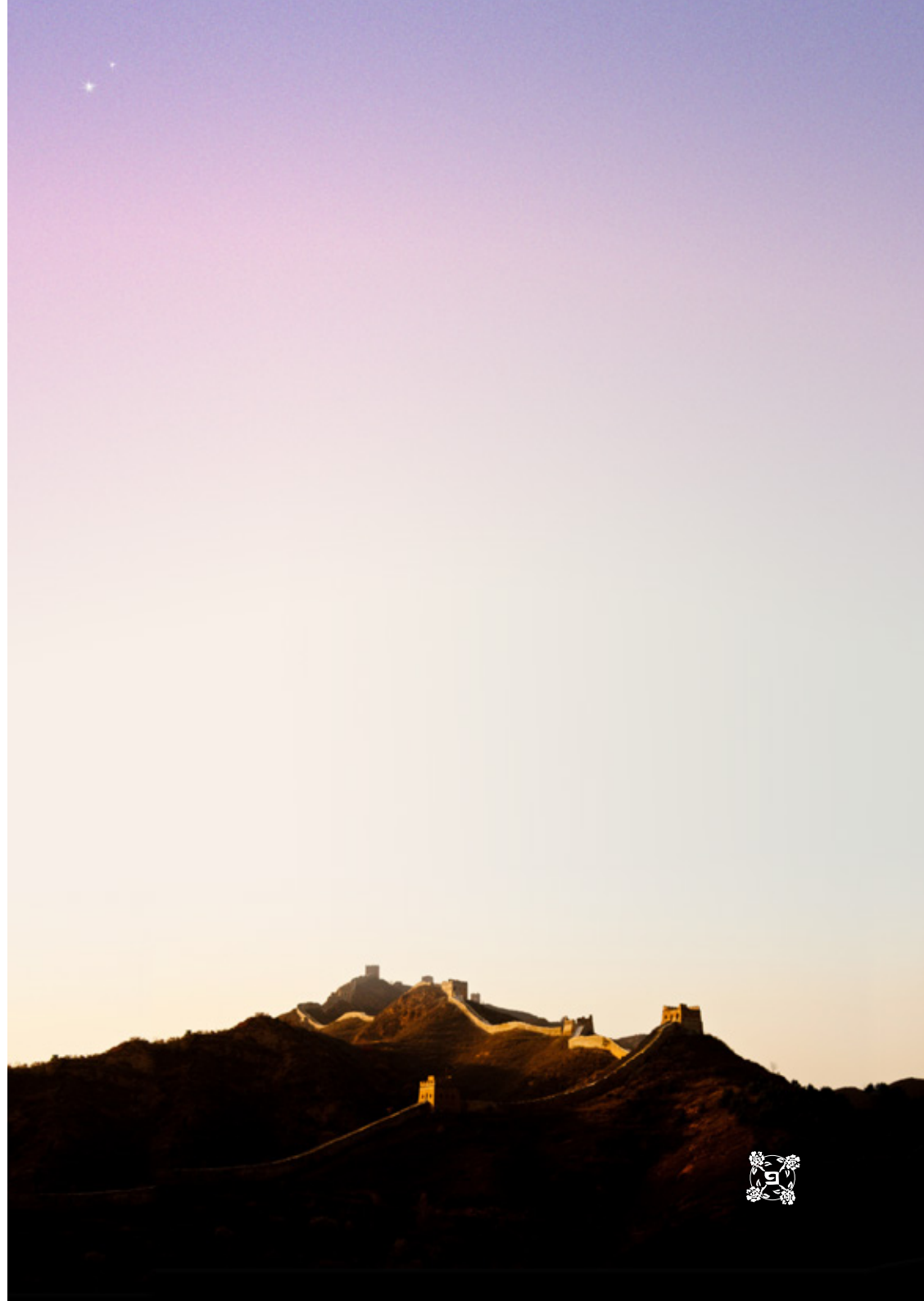
The long night is almost over;  
I wish you peace.

Sincerely yours,

Murong Xuecun

[**Note:** Murong Xuecun's microblogs remain inactive, although he began making occasional posts to Twitter after his Weibo accounts were terminated.]

**The Great Wall at dusk.**  
Artwork: Matt Barber and Markuz Wernli



## THE GLOBAL TIMES (HUANQIU SHIBAO 环球时报) IN RETROSPECT

**I**N 1993, the *People's Daily*, the venerable Communist Party mouthpiece, founded the *Global Times* — a tabloid-format newspaper that soon became known for its nationalistic take on world affairs that was part of its commercial strategy. The *People's Daily* media group was one of the earliest in China to experiment with the market. Previously, in 1981, it had established the English-language *China Daily* in collaboration with *The Age* newspaper in Australia. Then, in 1995, a company within the group entered into a joint venture with Rupert Murdoch's News Corp to build an IT business in China. Three years later, an affiliated advertising agency established a joint venture with *Beijing Scene* — a small American-run enter-

tainment magazine that other arms of the Chinese government had frequently shut down. But while the joint ventures with News Corp and *Beijing Scene* came to nothing, *Global Times* prospered.

In April 2012, the outspoken editor-in-chief of the *Global Times*, Hu Xijin, declared on his Sina Weibo microblog that print circulation of the paper had reached record highs and website traffic was continuing to grow. The *Global Times* currently boasts a daily circulation of two million copies — a high figure for a Chinese newspaper.

Since Hu took over from the founding editor He Chongyuan in 2005, he has perfected a formula of short, colloquial articles on global events, some of which are written by correspon-



dents abroad but many of which are simply digested from foreign news reports. Where stories concern China's interactions with other countries, the paper is unabashedly nationalistic, defensive of Communist Party rule and occasionally egregiously jingoistic.

In 2009, the *Global Times* launched an English edition focussing on news from and about China. Hu Xijin frequently claims that the Chinese version of the newspaper reports on a 'multipolar world' (*duoyuande shijie* 多元的世界), while the English edition tells the stories of a 'complicated China' (*fuzade Zhongguo* 复杂的中国).

Internet activists regularly mock Hu for being China's 'biggest Fifty Cent Party Member' — a reference to the 'Fifty-cent Party' made up of netizens supposedly paid fifty (Chinese) cents for each online comment they make supporting the government and its policies. As reported in the 2012 *Yearbook*, shortly after the arrest of dissident artist Ai Weiwei on 3 April 2011, Richard Burger — formerly a foreign editor at the English-language *Global Times* — wrote a blog post at Peking-



duck.org describing a staff meeting at which Hu Xijin ordered his journalists to visit online forums and social media sites and leave comments following the

party line of criticising Ai Weiwei.

Hu has almost four million followers on Weibo, and many defenders. But the sarcastic, anti-propaganda culture of Sina Weibo is not always welcoming of him. The comments on his postings are often scathing, with people decrying him as a dog, an arse-kisser and far worse. Such criticism generally goes uncensored. Hu argues on his Weibo account and in editorials that people on Weibo and 'public intellectuals' critical of the Party tend to be sanctimonious, but that the vast majority of Chinese people agree with how the government operates and they understand that China is a 'complicated' country. In tone, style and commercial popularity, Hu represents a Chinese version of Australia's Alan Jones or America's Rush Limbaugh.



## SELECT *GLOBAL TIMES* EDITORIALS, 2012–2013

Below are summaries of key *Global Times* editorials and articles published in 2012 and early 2013.

### JANUARY 2012

#### Anniversary of the Return of Hong Kong to Chinese Sovereignty in 1997

The *Global Times* praised the achievements of Hong Kong and emphasised the role of Beijing in ensuring the former colony's prosperity. The paper also recognised that not all Hong Kong residents feel the same: an editorial published on 20 January was titled 'Reunified for 15 years, it seems Hong Kongers' hearts have not come home' (香港回归已近15年, 港人心态似未回归).

### JULY 2012

#### Bogu Kailai: Everyone equal before the law

On 27 July, the day after Bo Xilai's wife Gu Kailai (aka Bogu Kailai, as state media referred to her after Bo's fall), the *Global Times* ran an editorial entitled 'Everyone is an ordinary person when facing criminal punishment' (任何人走上刑事被告席都是普通人).

### SEPTEMBER 2012

#### Views on Hong Kong

An editorial published on 11 September argued that Mainlanders should view Hong Kong politics with a detached attitude. If the future of a rising Hong Kong involves a desire to cause political trouble for the Mainland, this will naturally be a bad thing. But the Mainland has a lot of economic leverage with Hong Kong, and any Hong Kong resistance to the Mainland is futile.

### JANUARY 2013

#### Southern Weekly's Censored New Year Editorial

Published in response to the *Southern Weekly* incident (see the Introduction for more on this), a *Global Times* editorial insisted that even in Western countries mainstream media does not openly challenge the government, and that this attempt in China was doomed to failure. This editorial expressed the *Global Times*' vehement opposition to constitutionalism in China: 'Constitutional governance' is a Roundabout Way to Negate China's Development' ('宪政'是兜圈子否定中国发展之路).

## APRIL 2013

## The Death of Margaret Thatcher

An editorial published on 9 April following the death of former UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher reflected upon the history of her negotiations with Deng Xiaoping over the future of Hong Kong, concluding that she 'removed what remained of the power of the British Empire' (撒切尔夫人带走了大英帝国的余威).

## Diaoyu Islands

The *Global Times* has published numerous editorials on the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands issue. A report on 24 July 2012 stated that the landing of US aircraft at US bases in Japan was designed to assist Japan's defence of the Diaoyu Islands, while a piece on 25 July ridiculed the Japanese government's 'purchase' of the islands. On 15 October, an editorial blamed the US for complicating the issue (美国让钓鱼岛问题变得暧昧) and a 3 December article warned the US not to 'play with fire' (别拿钓鱼岛问题玩儿火).

A BRIEF ACCOUNT  
OF THE *GLOBAL TIMES*

In 2008 — the fifteenth anniversary of the launch of *Global Times* — the paper published a list of milestones in its history together with a gallery of front pages, which are abridged and translated below:

## 3 JANUARY 1993

The *People's Daily* launches *Global News Digest* (*Huanqiu wencui* 环球文萃) — a weekly eight-page tabloid-format newspaper. The first issue features a large colour photo of the actress Gong Li on the cover and an editorial introducing the newspaper with the slogan 'Let's take a global perspective' (让我们放眼环球).



## 5 JANUARY 1997

The newspaper changes its name to *Global Times* (环球时报 *Huanqiu shi-bao*) and expands to sixteen pages.

## SEPTEMBER 1997

The *Global Times* publishes a sincere and moving article on the death of Princess Diana. Circulation exceeds 280,000 copies.

## 5 OCTOBER 1997

The *Global Times* scoops the news that Kim Jong-il has finally assumed the role of General Secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and successfully predicts the date of his assumption of power later in the month.



The second major headline is 'Saudi Arabia to behead British nurse'.

## 4 JANUARY 1998

The *Global Times* is first with the news of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and South Africa.

## JUNE 1998

*Global Times* journalists track US President Bill Clinton's visit to China, drawing much attention from the foreign press.



21 June 1998 headlines:

- 'China experts [in America] talk about Bill Clinton's China visit'
- 'US military used toxic gas to eliminate traitors' (in reference to a report in CNN and *Time* that the US military acknowledged it had used gas to kill US army deserters in the Vietnam War).

#### 1 JANUARY 1999

The *Global Times* expands to twenty-four pages and begins printing full colour photographs on some pages.

#### APRIL–MAY 1999

The *Global Times* tracks the Kosovo war with its own correspondents on location, establishing the newspaper as a leader amongst Chinese media in reporting international news.

#### 9 MAY 1999

The *Global Times* publishes a special issue with an exclusive eyewitness account of the NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade. The article is reprinted by many newspapers nationwide. The circulation of this issue reaches 780,000.



Headline: 'Eyewitness account of the bombing of the Chinese embassy [in Belgrade]'.

#### JULY–SEPTEMBER 1999

The *Global Times* publishes eight front-page reports criticising the 'Two Country Theory' (*liangguolun* 两国论) of former Taiwan president Li Teng-hui. Circulation reaches 1.48 million.

#### 13 AUGUST 1999



Headlines:

- 'Tense atmosphere in Taiwan Straits'
- 'Japan always aims to strike the first blow'.

#### 4 JANUARY 2000

A report on the resignation of Boris Yeltsin appears on the front page of the first issue of the New Year. The *Global Times* now starts to appear twice-weekly in sixteen-page editions.



Headline: 'Yeltsin wisely gives up the throne'.

#### 2 JANUARY 2001

*Global Times'* twice-weekly editions expand to twenty-four pages.



Headlines:

- 'Both America and China are constructing new embassy buildings'
- 'George Bush concerned about his daughters'.



## 5 JANUARY 2001



## Headlines:

- 'Bill Clinton packs his bags' (photo shows Bill and Hilary Clinton cooking)
- 'The Taiwan authorities put on a show in Quemoy'.

## 4 APRIL 2001

The *Global Times* carries in-depth reports and pictures of the EP-3 incident (a US surveillance plane collided with a Chinese fighter jet over the South China Sea), which are reprinted by media worldwide.



## Headlines:

- 'American aircraft violated China's airspace'
- 'All eyes on Lingshui Airport'.

## 12 SEPTEMBER 2001

Due to the front-page report 'Terror attacks hits the United States', the circulation of the *Global Times* reaches 1.96 million.



## 9 OCTOBER 2001

The circulation of this issue of the *Global Times* with reports of British and American bombers over Afghanistan reaches two million.



Headline: 'US and UK bomb Afghanistan'.

## JUNE-JULY 2002

The *Global Times* publishes a special issue on the football World Cup held in South Korea and Japan.

## 1 JANUARY 2003

The *Global Times* begins publishing three twenty-four page issues per week on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

## FEBRUARY-APRIL 2003

The *Global Times* sends journalists to the Gulf to report on the Iraq war.

## 5 AUGUST 2003

The first *Life Weekly* supplement is published; subsequently one issue per week of twenty-four pages.

## 2 JANUARY 2004

Front-page article examines the situation across the Taiwan Straits.

## AUGUST 2004

Special issue on the Olympic Games in Athens, Greece.



## MICROBLOGGERS, CONVERSATIONS AND MEMES

### THE TOP MOST POPULAR MICROBLOGGERS

*Sina Weibo published a list of the most influential Weibo accounts of 2012. The list was devised by evaluating variables such as the number of original tweets, retweets, comments, the downstream ‘influence’ of users retweeting those tweets and leaving comments, as well as the ratio of active to inactive followers of the user. The most influential individuals were:*

#### 1. Li Kaifu

Former head of Google China and venture capitalist

#### 2. He Jiong

Hunan TV presenter

#### 3. Xie Na

Hunan TV presenter

#### 4. Ren Zhiqiang

Chairman of Huayuan Real Estate Group

#### 5. Charles Xue

IT entrepreneur, investor

#### 6. Yao Chen

Actress

#### 7. Amy Cheung

Hong Kong-based novelist

#### 8. Yang Mi

Actress

#### 9. Pan Shiyi

Chairman of SOHO China, a real estate company

#### 10. Ashin

Lead singer of the Taiwanese rock band Mayday (*Wuyuetian* 五月天).



**Li Kaifu.**  
Source:  
ITxinwen.com



**He Jiong.**  
Source:  
Advagent.com



**Xie Na.**  
Source: Guang-  
ming Online



**Ren Zhiqiang.**  
Source: Huaqi  
Business School



**Charles Xue.**  
Source: Truez-  
hen IT



**Yao Chen.**  
Source:  
Herschina



**Amy Cheung.**  
Source:  
tkWin.com



**Yang Mi.**  
Source: Guang-  
ming Online



**Pan Shiyi.**  
Source:  
Xinhua



**Ashin.**  
Source:  
Star-Pedia.com

## THE TOP TEN MICROBLOG TOPICS

Since 2005, Topics (huati 话题) — a series of annual anthologies edited by Yang Zao and published by Sanlian Joint Publishing in Beijing — has been rounding up each year's most prominent issues. The 2012 installment includes discussions of the Nobel Prize, the controversy over whether the blogger-essayist Han Han has authored all of the work published under his name, the Hong Kong-Mainland culture clash, the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands contretemps, the party Samaritan Lei Feng, volunteerism and its depoliticisation, imperial court costume dramas, online 'loser' culture, current net-speak and food culture.

At the end of Yang Zao's book is this list of the top ten microblog discussions of the year:

- the Wukan Model [of local democratic reform]
- anti-Japanese demonstrations
- a tale of two Olympics
- storms in Beijing
- depression and senility
- doctors who kill
- National Day gridlock
- whether talent show hosts should be able to see contestants
- foreigners in China
- Guizhentang [a traditional Chinese medicine company that extracts bile from bile bears]
- animal protection.



Yang Zao.  
Source: Xinhua



The 2012 edition of *Topics* by Yang Zao and Sa Zhishan.  
Source: Mask9.com

## TOP INTERNET MEMES 2012–2013

This is a list of some of the words and ideas that have recently captivated Chinese Internet users.

### Gandie 干爹

Traditionally, this word refers to an honorary father or godfather — a role someone might take on for a friend's children. These days, it's gained a new meaning as a euphemism used by younger, kept women to refer to their older lovers. On a program about antiques and jewellery aired on Henan TV in 2012, an attractive young woman brought in a jade pendant for expert appraisal. With great pride, she said the jade was a present from her *gandie*, adding that he was a real estate developer. To her dismay, the jewellery experts told her the jade, the value of which she clearly expected to be astronomical, was just a cheap fake.

A *gandie* incident was the source of another Internet meme: 'pussy-clutching miniskirt' (*qi b xiao duanqun* 齐b小短裙), which means an ultra-short skirt that barely covers the crotch. (The crude but popular word for a woman's crotch is pronounced *bi*). The term became famous during the National People's Congress meetings in March 2012 when a microblogger using the name Zhou Rui Emily posted a photo of her-



Zhou Rui Emily cutting a birthday cake with her *gandie* in March 2012.  
Source: Sina Weibo

self cutting a birthday cake with her *gandie*, whose face was obscured by a Photoshopped heart, accompanied by the following text:

Thank you for being a constant companion to me in life, thank you, *Gandie*, for taking time out when you're so busy with the Two Meetings, thank you to teacher Li Yang-

min for the calligraphy he wrote for us that says: 'Long live love and mutual understanding!' Thanks to all my friends for their good wishes! If I have you, I am happy!

The mention of a *gandie* who appeared to be an official of the Congress started a 'human flesh search engine' — a collective effort by Internet users who combed through Emily Zhou's Weibo posts and looked elsewhere online for clues as to her and her *gandie*'s identities. These searches turned up several photos of her dressed revealingly and posing with expensive cars, and also a photo of her legs and a very short skirt, together with the text 'One of my little friends says I am forbidden from wearing pussy-clutching miniskirts in the future'.

The expression 'pussy-clutching miniskirt' was adopted almost overnight by social media users and by vendors of clothing on Taobao (usually glossed as 'China's eBay'), who began advertising short skirts using the new formulation. However, Taobao soon banned the word, although variants still persist: a search on Taobao for the homophomous variant *qi bi xiao duan-qun* 齐比小短裙 in July 2013 turned up

1155 people selling very short skirts. In June 2013, Zhou Rui Emily posted 'wedding gown photographs' (*hunshazhao* 婚纱照) — posed photographs of a bride and groom, usually taken by professional photographer several weeks before, or even as a substitute for, a wedding. The groom was wearing the same Hermès belt as the man in the *gandie* photographs. As of July 2013, Zhou had 156,344 followers on Sina Weibo, and she continues to post photos of herself in revealing attire.

#### Diaosi 屌丝

Literally 'penis thread', *diaosi* is a self-deprecating epithet used by men who, sarcastically or otherwise, perceive themselves as losers in society. In a world in which marriage is all too frequently like a commercial transaction, a *diaosi* might possess the traditional virtues of reliability, industry and loyalty, but lack the requisites for social success in today's China: wealth, power and good looks. He's thus a *diaosi* — a loser unable to win the hand, for example, of a desirably pale, rich and pretty (*bai fu mei* 白富美), if icy, goddess.



Billboard on Times Square for fantasy game, stating 'Diaosi, Made in China' in April 2013.  
Source: Sina Weibo

After percolating across online gaming forums for several years, the term *diaosi* burst into the public consciousness in 2012. It was soon adopted by wealthy celebrities who were by no stretch of the imagination losers, such as Shi Yuzhu, the billionaire founder of the gaming company Giant Interactive. In April 2013, Shi's company bought a billboard ad in New York's Times Square promoting the interactive fantasy game 'The Mythical Realm' with the words '*Diaosi*, Made in China'. The billboard was taken down once the ad company was informed of the term's meaning.

#### Watch Brother (*biaoge* 表哥)

Yang Dacai, a safety official in Shaanxi province, became the object of public ire when he was photographed with a smirk on his face at the scene of a deadly multi-car accident in Yan'an on 26 August 2012, an incident later dubbed 'Smile-gate' (*weixiaomen* 微笑门). Angry Internet users scoured the net for additional incriminating evidence and turned up a variety of photographs in which Yang was wearing different pricey foreign watches. A subsequent investigation revealed that he owned eighty-three watches and had more than sixteen million yuan in cash and bank deposits that couldn't legally be accounted for. Yang was removed from his posts on 21 September and dismissed from the Party on 22 February 2013, after which his case was turned over to the criminal justice system.



Yang Dacai, smiling, at the site of the tragic collision where thirty-six people lost their lives.  
Source: Sina Weibo



## Are You Happy? (*Ni xingfu ma?* 你幸福吗?)



Prompted by the question 'Are You Happy?' the man replies 'Don't ask me, I'm an itinerant labourer.'  
Source: CCTV

Beginning in October 2012, the state broadcaster China Central Television sent its reporters into the streets to ask people across the country if they were happy. Their answers, some of them unexpectedly hilarious, aired on the nightly newscast and became a running meme that was referenced in the 2013 Spring Festival Gala.

### Sparta 斯巴达

Preparations for the Eighteenth Party Congress in November 2012 involved beefed-up security and Internet cen-

sorship, including a ban on discussing the Congress itself. The colloquial name for the Congress, *Shiba Da* 十八大, is a near-homophone for the Chinese term for the ancient Greek city-state of 'Sparta', and so the substitution proliferated across China's social networks, along with copious references to the 2007 American action film *300*, which reimagines the Battle of Thermopylae. 'My Internet speed is becoming slower and slower', one Sina Weibo user complained. 'Is this because Sparta is coming?'

## Qiegao 切糕

A price dispute over *qiegao* — a common Uyghur snack made of sugar, honey, nuts and dried fruit — caused a brawl in Yueyang, Hunan province, in December 2012 that resulted in police ordering a customer to compensate vendors for the value of their de-

stroyed goods: 160,000 yuan. The size of the compensation turned *qiegao* into Internet joke fodder: 'Dear *Gandie*,' reads one, 'if you love me, don't give me a Maserati or Louis Vuitton bags; I just want a piece of *qiegao*.'



Xinjiang *qiegao* on tricycles with Uyghur sellers in December 2012.  
Source: News.house365

[**Note:** See page 374 for other Internet memes popular in 2012 and 2013. — Eds.]

