News Roundup

March–early May 2006

COMPILED BY CAROL K. WANG

CENSORSHIP

ACCOONA CONTRACTED

Chinese officials and Western investors gathered in New York on March 8 for the unveiling of the Internet search engine Accoona, which signed a 20-year contract with the online version of the state-run China Daily. Based in New Jersey, Accoona is the latest of several Western corporations, including Microsoft, Cisco, Yahoo and Google, that have adjusted their products to meet China's Internet requirements. (FrontPage, World Magazine)

SURVEILLANCE PROVIDER ANNOUNCED FOR SHENZHEN CAFÉS

On March 21, China Security and Surveillance Technology Inc. ("China Security") announced that the Shenzhen Cyber Café Association had named it the primary surveillance system and service provider for all cafés in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province. The China Security contract follows the issuing of an ordinance by the State Council that requires all entertainment halls to have video-monitoring systems by March 1, 2006. China Security's contract is worth an estimated $3 million, spread over the next 12 months. There are approximately 1,000 Internet cafés in Shenzhen. (PR Newswire)

FOREIGN MAGAZINES CENSORED

A media moratorium that has been in place for over a year was first reported on April 7 by *The Asian Wall Street Journal*. The moratorium limits the ability of foreign magazines to publish Chinese editions within mainland China. The government has not formally publicized the policy, though officials have anonymously confirmed its existence. The Chinese version of *Rolling Stone Magazine* was discontinued in March after publishing one translated issue. (AP)

GOOGLE'S STANCE

Google chief executive officer Eric Schmidt argued that compliance with official Chinese regulations is necessary for the company to fulfill its mission to "serve all the people in the world." Speaking at the launch of Google's new Chinese name on April 12, Schmidt asserted that the company's "number one goal, by far, is to serve the Chinese citizen who wants information." (Mail & Guardian)

COMPANIES AGREE TO SELF-CENSOR

On April 9, 14 Beijing-based web portals, including Sina.com, Sohu.com, Baidu.com and Yahoo's Chinese Web site, stated in a joint proposal that they would block "unhealthy" content from their sites. This followed a call by the Internet Society of China (ISOC) for companies to sign a "Public Pledge of Self-Regulation." Eleven news websites, including Xinhuanet.com, People.com.cn, China.com.cn, Chinadaily.com.cn and Chinanews.com, have made a similar statement of support. The proposal's stated intent is to oppose and crack down on indecent messages, sex or violent content, and photos in "poor taste." (XH)

SKYPE PARTNER CENSORS

VoIP firm Skype confirmed on April 19 that its Chinese partner, Tom Online, censors text messages. Niklas Zennström, Skype's chief executive, told reporters that its joint venture partner in China is operating in compliance with domestic law. "Tom had implemented a text filter, which is what everyone else in that market is doing," said Mr Zennström. "Those are the regulations." He also cites instances in which Western countries censor information: "I may like or not like the laws and regulations to operate businesses in the UK or Germany or the U.S., but if I do business there I choose to comply with those laws and regulations. I can try to lobby to change them, but I need to comply with them. China in that way is not different." He says that Skype will not put its users at risk, or jeopardize their privacy. (FT)

LABOR

UNEMPLOYMENT

With its large labor supply and economic uncertainty, China is expected to see a rise in its unemployment rate during the second and third fiscal quarters, despite an increase in new jobs during the first quarter. According to the government's state planner, approximately 1.64 million new jobs were created between January and March. However, 25 million jobs will need to be created this year in order to maintain the country's current unemployment rate of 4.2 percent amidst China's growing number of university graduates and workers laid off from state firms. (Reuters)

DISASTERS

At least 26 miners died in a flood at the Fanjiashan Coal Mine in Linxian, Shanxi Province on March 18. Thirty of the 58 miners working underground at the time managed to escape, but two others remained missing. The victims' families will each receive 200,000 *yuan* ($24,660) in compensation, according to a local government official. The cause of the flooding is unknown. (XH)

A chlorine leak at the Donggang Electrochemical Factory in Zhejiang Province on March 22 sent nearly 200 people to the hospital with dizziness, coughing and chest pain. Fifty-one were admitted for further treatment. Witnesses reported seeing a cloud of gas over their fields. The factory, which manufactured alkali, sulfuric acid and other chemicals, had reportedly been closed by officials. There were no serious injuries reported, although farmers feared for their crops, some of which were scorched by the gas. (AFP)

An explosion at a gas well on March 15 forced the evacuation of some 15,000 residents of Xiaoyang Village, Gaoqiao Town, Chongqing. Although no deaths were reported, the nearby Gaoqiao River was believed to have been contaminated, and farmers expressed fear for their livestock. The accident occurred when a well owned by the Chuangdong Drilling Company (a subsidiary of China National Petroleum Corporation) began to leak during final tests before it was brought into production. Witnesses reported a "big bang" and an immediate "bubbling" effect in the Gaoqiao River. State media reported high levels of hydrogen sulfide, which causes breathing difficulties and burning in the eyes and on skin, detected within a kilometer of the leak. Engineers were finally able to seal the well with an adhesive gel and alumina cement on their third attempt, and officials said that evacuees, who have been living in temporary shelters, would be allowed to return home on March 31. Another accident that occurred here in 2003 under the

same management killed 243 people. (AP, AFP)

At least four miners died following a mine blast in Guizhou Province on March 26 that filled an 80-meter-long tunnel with coal dust. Eighty-nine of the 104 miners on duty at the state-owned Wulunshan Coal Mine in Nayong County were able to escape, but nine of them were hospitalized, and 11 remained missing. Investigators are looking into the cause of the explosion at the mine, which is being expanded for the Nayong Thermal Power Plant. (XH)

Six miners were confirmed dead in a mining accident in Lengshuijiang City, Hunan Province on April 6. A gas blast ripped through the Dongtang Coal Mine at 10:24 A.M. while 14 miners, including six women, were working in the mine. Three miners who remained missing as of April 9 are assumed dead. The Hunan provincial government had ordered the mine to suspend production in March because of heavy concentrations of gas. (XH)

Thirty-two miners died as the result of a gas explosion at the Wayaobao Coal Mine in Zichang, Shaanxi Province on the afternoon of April 29. Only eight of a reported 39 miners on duty at the time survived the blast, and one of four who were seriously injured died later at the hospital. An investigation is underway at the Wayaobao Township Coal Mine, which is a legal, privately owned company with an annual production capacity of 30,000 tons. (XH)

Five miners were killed in an explosion at a coal mine in Yegou Village, Huangdong Township, Jiaxian County on April 26. Seven other miners among the 66 reportedly working underground at the time were injured. The mine is operated by Daliushan Coal Mine, a subsidiary of the Henan Yuantian Corporation. (XH)

The collapse of an ore tailing dam at the Miaolinggou iron ore mine in Qian'an, Tangshan City, Hebei Province resulted in the death of one worker, with five still missing. The accident, which occurred around 7 A.M. on April 23, is being investigated. (XH)

PETITIONS AND PROTESTS

BEIJING PETITIONERS DETAINED AT NPC

Chinese authorities cracked down on petitioners who converged on Beijing prior to the opening of the annual session of the National People's Congress on March 5. **Liu Xinjuan** and several other petitioners protesting forcible relocation in urban redevelopment schemes were sent back to Shanghai, where Liu was detained against her will in a mental hospital. Farmers, laid-off workers, evicted families and individuals with HIV/AIDS were among others protesting in Beijing. (BBC)

TIBETANS CALL OFF HUNGER STRIKE

Three members of the Tibetan Youth Congress (TYC) on February 27 agreed to end a two-week hunger strike at the Torino Olympic Winter Games after International Olympic Committee officials assured the group that its concerns would be addressed. The TYC is part of a coalition of human rights organizations attempting to highlight China's poor human rights record in the run-up to Beijing's hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games. The protesters, who began their hunger strike on February 14, emphasized that China's human rights violations are contrary to the principles and values of the Olympic Charter. (ICT, TYC)

POLLUTION PROTESTED

The Shenzhen Municipal Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference on March 20 joined local residents in closing down a waste incineration plant that has been the focus of protests by more than 3,000 people since January. Local residents say the plant emits carcinogenic pollution. When it opened in 1988, the plant was located in a sparsely populated area of Guangdong Province, but residential complexes have been built around it in recent years. (CD)

XIDITOU PROTESTS OVER LAND

About 200 people from Luxinhe near Tianjin staged a sit-in demonstration in front of the Xiditou township government offices on March 16, while 200 others protested outside a construction site in Luxinhe. In a related incident, villagers from Dongditou accused village head Yu Guanglong and several other local officials of embezzlement. A village spokesperson said that 40 hectares of village farmland had been appropriated to build the 177 kilometer-long Second Jingjintang Expressway, but that just 17.5 hectares would be used. The villagers, who have not received any compensation, said that the central government paid local village officials 525,000 *yuan* for the land. Protesters said that they were encouraged by Premier Wen Jiabao's remarks about farmers' rights earlier that week and his criticisms of illegal land seizures. The scene of the protest was closely guarded by local police, as was the main road in Xiditou. News media reported on April 4 that the villagers remained on the scene. (AFP, SCMP)

DONGZHOU VILLAGERS SILENCED

Families in Dongzhouken, Shanwei, Guangdong Province, where police killed at least three protesters last year, have been forced to sign a pledge of silence regarding the incident, according to a news report published on April 1. A victim's family member said that relatives have been kept under strict surveillance since February, and that some villagers had attempted to contact foreign media to highlight the case. "They [local government officials] forced all relatives of victims, injured people and their family members to sign a statement which said they wouldn't say anything to overseas media or make contact with outsiders, otherwise they would be punished," said the foster father of Lin Yidui, a 26-year-old victim. Isolated since the meeting of the National People's Congress last month, the villagers are afraid to leave their homes. (SCMP)

DITIAN VILLAGE BLOCKADE

Residents of Guangdong Province's Ditian Village have been blockading an industrial park in protest over the detention of five villagers in early April during a clash with police. The villagers were protesting the allocation of more than 200 hectares of farmland for the construction of the Foshan National High-Tech Industries Development Zone without village approval. A villager said that the crowd at the blockade ranged from 20 to 3,000, depending on the circumstances. "When we need people, we beat the gong to summon them and thousands can come quickly." The protesters say they will remain until the five detainees are released. (SCMP)

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

HU JIA RELEASED FROM SECRET LOCATION

Chinese AIDS activist **Hu Jia** was released on March 28 after 41 days in the custody of public security officials. His family had received no word of him since his disappearance on February 16, which drew expressions of concern from the UN Human Rights Commission. Hu was one of hundreds of individuals who participated in hunger strikes in support of a protest led by human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng. Hu said he continued his hunger strike during the first five days of his detention, but was told that he would be force-fed if he did not eat. He suffers from cirrhosis and reportedly lost 22 pounds. (Guardian UK)

FILMMAKER HELD

On March 21 it was revealed that Chinese authorities had detained a documentary filmmaker who was researching underground churches. **Wu Hao**, who was working with human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng, was detained by State Security police on February 22 after meeting members of an underground church in Beijing. Police searched Wu's apartment on February 24 and seized equipment and several videotapes. The specific charges or reasons underlying Wu's arrest are unclear. (RFA)

PAPERS CONFISCATED

Gao Zhisheng, a prominent dissident lawyer who initiated a hunger strike in February, said authorities confiscated documents that he needed to attend the Freedom in China Summit organized by U.S. Congress members in early May. He also reported being subjected to constant surveillance and phone tapping. Gao has gained a reputation for providing legal assistance to Christians and Falun Gong practitioners. U.S. lawmakers have taken up Gao's cause, and adopted a resolution in late April urging Chinese leaders to lift a ban on Gao's law firm. Other dissidents, including Li Baiguang, Yu Jie, Wang Yi and Guo Feixiong, were given permission to attend the conference. (AFP)

DETAINED

Sun Xiaodi, a longtime petitioner exposing uranium contamination in Gansu Province, has been in detention since April 6 after participating in a protest over the detention conditions of a fellow petitioner, **Yue Yongjin**. Sun was detained for eight months without cause last year, and held under house arrest until March 20. Sun had gone to visit Yue at the Sujiatun District Detention Center, and reported that Yue was emaciated as a result of being forced to perform prison labor while fed just three flour buns a day. The protest took place on March 30 at Yue's native Zhangliangbao Village. There has been no word on Sun's whereabouts since April 6.

HARASSED

The survival of the family of Beijing-based dissident **Qi Zhiyong** came under threat after Qi was arbitrarily detained on February 8. Qi was a worker protester at Tiananmen Square who lost a leg as a result of being shot during the June 1989 crackdown. In the years since 1989, he has been placed under official surveillance and periodic house arrest, and has also been attacked by police-sanctioned thugs. As a result of his participation in the hunger strikes organized by lawyer Gao Zhisheng earlier this year, he was placed under house arrest and was then detained for 42 days by the Xuanwu District National Defense Squad. Following his release on March 28, Qi learned that Lu Shiying, his wife, had been dismissed from her job because of his activities. Two days later, the family received notice from the Xuanwu District Business and Development Department that as of April 11, the family's small shop would be closed down on the grounds of "building code violations." The couple has a young daughter in primary school.

TRIAL DEVELOPMENTS

Hopes for the imminent release of detained journalist **Zhao Yan** dimmed as his lawyer, Mo Shaoping, announced on April 18 that the authorities had resumed investigation against his client. In mid-March there had been speculation that the former *New York Times* researcher would be released after previous charges were dropped prior to Hu Jintao's visit to the United States, but Zhao's lawyer subsequently stated that June 8 has been set as a preliminary trial date. Zhao has been in detention for over 18 months awaiting trial on charges of fraud and leaking state secrets. His case has drawn much international attention, and U.S. officials have reportedly raised it with Hu Jintao on several occasions, but Beijing continues to describe it as an internal affair. (NYT, FT, SCMP)

Shandong-based teacher and online writer **Ren Ziyuan** was sentenced to 10 years in prison on March 17 on charges of "subversion of state power." Detained by police in May 2005, Ren went on trial at the Jining City Intermediate People's Court in September on accusations of posting subversive essays, including "The Road to Democracy," as well as for attempting to form a political group called the Mainland Democratic Frontline. Ren pleaded not guilty to the charges and intends to appeal the verdict. (CNN)

The sister of imprisoned dissident **Zhao Changqing** on April 10 received an update on his conditions in solitary confinement. Zhao had been placed in solitary confinement in Shaanxi Province No. 2 Prison for more than 40 days after he refused to sing a socialist anthem during the prison's flag-raising ceremony on February 18. Prison officials told Zhao's sister that he will remain in solitary confinement for three months because of his unwillingness to accept prison procedures, as well as for his unauthorized contact with some Falun Gong practitioners who had also been placed in solitary confinement. Zhao was detained for more than four months following his participation in the 1989 democracy movement, and again for various periods since then. Currently serving five years for "incitement to subvert state power," he has been in prison since August 2003.

The Zibo City Intermediate People's Court in Shandong Province on April 12 began hearing the subversion case of Chinese dissident **Li Jianping**. Li, 40, a businessman and writer, was arrested in May 2005 after posting pro-democracy articles on the Internet. Li had been charged with libel at the time of arrest, but the charge was changed to the more serious "incitement to subvert state power" after the case was transferred to the People's Procuratorate. The maximum penalty for subversion is 15 years in jail. (RFA)

HRIC learned in April that dissident **Wang Xiaoning** was sentenced to 10 years in prison on the basis of essays he distributed through the Internet. Wang was sentenced more than two years ago, but his case has only recently come to light. He

was detained on September 1, 2002 on suspicion of "incitement to subvert state power." He was formally arrested on September 30, 2002, and went to trial at the Beijing Municipal First Intermediate People's Court on July 25, 2003. On September 12, 2003, the court sentenced Wang to 10 years in prison and two years' subsequent deprivation of political rights.

Yang Xiaoqing, a journalist who reported on local corruption in Hunan Province, will go on trial in mid-May on blackmail charges, according reports quoting his wife on May 3. Yang will be tried in Longhui County, Hunan Province even though that is the geographical base of the political leaders referred to in Yang's stories. Yang is accused of fabricating his corruption stories in order to blackmail local officials. News reports quoted an unnamed police official in Changsha, the capital of Hunan Province, as saying there had already been "relatively severe administrative interference" in the case against Yang. Yang's wife also reports that officials have prevented Yang's lawyer from reviewing the case. Yang has reportedly suffered ill health since his detention in January. (FT)

RELEASED

Tong Shidong, 72, a retired physics professor, was released on March 9 from Hunan's Chisan Prison after serving seven years of a 10-year sentence. Tong was convicted of subversion in 1999 for writing essays on democracy and drafting a founding declaration for a local chapter of the China Democracy Party. He was reportedly granted two reductions in his sentence for good behavior and because of his advanced age. (UPI)

Phuntsog Nyidrol, a Tibetan nun, arrived in San Francisco with a U.S. embassy official on March 15. She had spent the last two years under house arrest after being released from Lhasa Prison in 2004. She was imprisoned for 15 years after taking part in protests in Tibet in 1989. (AFP)

Thai immigration officials released Chinese dissident **Lu Decheng** from a Bangkok detention center on April 11 following delays to his planned release on March 14. Lu flew to Vancouver, where he had been granted political asylum. Lu had been released on parole in early 1998 after serving just over nine years of a 16-year jail term for defacing a portrait of Mao Zedong at Tiananmen Square in 1989. He fled to Thailand in November 2004, and was arrested by Thai police a month later. Held by Thai authorities under threat of deportation, Lu was granted asylum in Canada with the aid of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). On March 14, the day that he had been scheduled to leave for Canada, Lu was detained by Thai immigration officers after his Canadian sponsors received an e-mail informing them that the Chinese government had intervened and prevented Lu from leaving Thailand. (RFA)

DEATH PENALTY

Amnesty International on March 1 condemned the Guangdong High People's Court for ruling that the death penalty can be imposed for purse-snatching or other violent robberies. This decision came amid claims by China's Supreme People's Court that it plans to increase transparency in death penalty cases; the number of executions that take place annually remains a "state secret." (VOA, AI)

Yuan Baojing, 38, former president of the Beijing-based Jianhao Group, was executed on March 16 after being convicted of murder by the Liaoning City Intermediate People's Court in January 2005. (VOA)

Wu Daping and **Pan Mingquan**, accused of kidnapping and selling 12 baby boys, were sentenced to death by the Kunming Intermediate People's Court in Yunnan Province on March 20. (XH)

A man surnamed **Zhou**, 43, was convicted of assaulting three women and sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve by the Baishan City Intermediate People's Court in Jilin Province on March 20. (Beijing News)

Ding Qiwei, **Yang Dajun** and **Sun Peijun**, gang members convicted of murdering the former deputy chief of the Gansu Province Propaganda Bureau in November 2005, were sentenced to death by the Lanzhou Intermediate People's Court in Gansu on April 19. (XH)

Lin Ping, a billionaire businessman convicted of murdering his business rival, was sentenced to death by the Baotao Intermediate People's Court in Inner Mongolia on April 20. (Beijing News)

Hu Yaonong, **Cao Ying** and **Yin Xiaomin**, unemployed men in their 40s, were executed on April 25 after the Xi'an High People's Court convicted them of raping, robbing and murdering nine women between 1993 and 2005. (Ming Pao)

Shi Changyou, 28, convicted of murdering his cousin after being refused a loan, was sentenced to death by the Beijing No.1 Intermediate People's Court on April 26. (Beijing News)

Liu Limin, a police officer in Shanxi Province convicted of instigating a group of gang members to beat another police officer to death on May 3, 2005, was sentenced to death by the Taiyuan Intermediate People's Court in Shanxi on April 27, 2006. (Chinese Newsnet)

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Zhang Dewang, a businessman convicted of tax evasion, was sentenced to death by the Qiqihar Intermediate People's Court in Heilongjiang Province on April 20. (XH)

Hu Guiding, a former policeman convicted of stealing 5.5 million *yuan* from a Hunan post office where he was working as a security guard, was sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve by the Yueyang Intermediate People's Court in Hunan Province on April 21. (Beijing News)

Li Youcan, a former trade official in Hebei Province convicted of taking bribes totaling 47 million *yuan*, had his death sentence upheld on appeal by the Hebei High People's Court on April 26. (RFA)

ABBREVIATIONS

AFP	Agence France-Presse
AI	Amnesty International
AP	Associated Press
FT	Financial Times
ICT	International Campaign for Tibet
NYT	The New York Times
PD	People's Daily
RFA	Radio Free Asia
SCMP	South China Morning Post
TYC	Tibetan Youth Congress
VOA	Voice of America
UPI	United Press International
XH	Xinhua News Agency

Uncited information comes from HRIC sources.