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CHINA LIMITS DATA FOR FOREIGNERS

In March, the Cyberspace Administration of China notified data providers to restrict overseas access to China-based data on information, including corporate-registration, patents, procurement documents, academic journals, and official statistical yearbooks. The Shanghai-based Wind information, for instance, has cut off foreign access to corporate-registry data sets, and the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) has limited foreign universities' access to digital records. Due to a lack of official clarity on what types of data are now off-limits, inspectors have "ample latitude in determining the companies and activities that would be subject to mandatory disclosure or security reviews," said a new report by the Atlantic Council and Rhodium Group. (*Wall Street Journal*, May 7, 2023)

BEIJING TRAINS RURAL CADRES

To tighten up grassroots governance, China has launched "The largest training session for rural cadres in recent years." Last month, 212 village party secretaries and village committee directors attended a four-day, in-person training course in Beijing aimed at ensuring loyalty and stability at the county level. Tens of thousands of rural cadres attended the first national-level training sessions hosted by the central party school via video link in classrooms at provincial and county-level party schools. Participants received lectures from party school leaders, as well as cadres from the Central Organization Department, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, and the Ministry of Justice. "This is the first time that the central organization department and the central party school directly conducted training for all village cadres," the *People's Daily* reported. The goal is for "every cadre, no matter their rank, to perform," noted Xie Maosong of the Taihe Institute in Beijing. (*South China Morning Post*, May 17, 2023)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The scale of these sessions is also unusual for the Central Party School in Beijing, which tends to focus on preparing promising party officials at the county level for advancement. Lower-level officials are usually trained in their respective provincial or municipal party school branches.]

CHINA CLAMPS DOWN ON COMEDY

A joke by comedian Li Haoshi about China's military has spurred an uproar. Audiences at comedy shows in China are asked not to record because a short clip can be taken out of context on social media. Nevertheless, Li went viral when an audience member posted a joke he made on May 13, in which he "demeaned" the People's Liberation Army. Li quickly apologized, but Beijing police still announced an investigation and Beijing's Culture and Tourism Bureau fined his comedy company \$2.13 million and cancelled its shows. Other companies have also cleared their comedy schedules. "Stand-up comedy has been the last bastion in which people can still enjoy entertaining commentary about public life. After this, the space for stand-up comedy and public expression in general will inevitably keep shrinking," said Beijing-based political analyst Wu Qiang. (Reuters, May 20, 2023)

CHINA INCENTIVIZES FAMILIES

After China's population declined for the first time in 2022, Beijing is now aiming to create a "new era" of marriage and childbearing by providing housing, tax, and education benefits to families with two or more children. China's Family Planning Association is launching pilot projects in more than 20 cities to create social environments that encourage young people to start families. During one event in Guangzhou, officials said they want parents to share child-rearing responsibilities and to curb high "Bride prices," which average \$20,000 in some provinces. Shenzhen is offering families with three or more children \$2825; in Weifang, Shandong families with three children qualify for free high school education; and in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi families with two or three children receive a subsidy of up to \$45 per square meter when buying a house. New guidance from Beijing encourages employers to allow parents flexible hours and the option to work from home. (*Quartz*, May 15, 2023)

[EDITOR'S NOTE: China's population is on track to drop below 1 billion by 2080, and below 800 million by 2100. Weddings in China are declining, and in 2021 hit their lowest level since 1985. The one-child policy was relaxed to two children in 2016 and then three in 2021, but to little effect.]

CHINA'S "SMOKELESS WAR" AGAINST SPIES

On April 26, China's legislature approved a revision to the country's counter-espionage law. The old version listed colluding to "Steal, pry into, purchase or illegally provide state secrets or intelligence" as espionage, while the new one also applies the definition to "Other documents, data, materials or items related to national security or interests." the revised law sends the message that Chinese should be extremely cautious about sharing any information with foreigners that is not available in official media or websites. Indeed, China's "smokeless war" against spies is causing jitters. In March, for instance, a senior employee of Japanese drug firm Astellas Pharma, and long-time resident of China, was arrested in Beijing for spying. He is the seventeenth Japanese that China's counter-espionage police have seized since 2015. (*The Economist*, May 4, 2023)