

Why Facebook Is Banned in China & How to Access It

By Kristina Zucchi

Facebook ([FB](#)) has more than 2.5 billion monthly active users worldwide, with primarily no footprint in China.¹ That's because Facebook is banned in China, along with many other global social media providers. The Chinese government controls internet content and restricts, deletes, or bans content it deems is not in the interest of the state. This has grown to become a long list of companies.

Key Takeaways

- The 'Great Firewall' in China prevents internet users from viewing or posting socially or politically sensitive content.
- Facebook and other foreign internet companies are blocked in China, and Facebook's efforts to court China have been rebuffed.
- Meanwhile, homegrown services such as TikTok, WeChat, Sina Weibo and Tencent QQ flourish under the watchful eye of government censors.

Timeline of Actions

Chinese authorities blocked Facebook—along with Twitter and Google services—in July 2009 following riots in Xinjiang, a special autonomous region in western China. The crackdown was aimed at curtailing communications among independence activists.²

China is considered to have one of the most extensive and sophisticated censorship regimes in the world.³ Dubbed the "Great Firewall," a number of methods are employed to control online expression, including website blocking and keyword filtering, censoring social media, and arresting content posters who broach sensitive or political issues.⁴ A host of government agencies wield authority over the internet in China, such as the Central Propaganda Department and the Ministry of Public Security.⁵ In 2014, it established the Cyberspace Administration of China as the main body for internet censorship in China.⁶

The Great Firewall prevents users from accessing foreign news sites such as the BBC, *The New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, among others.⁷ Foreign web services that are blocked include Facebook, Google, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Yahoo, Slack and YouTube.⁸

In 2018, Facebook attempted to set up a \$30 million subsidiary in Hangzhou to incubate start-ups and give advice to local businesses. Permission to run the start-up was quickly withdrawn.⁹

Despite not being able to operate in China, Facebook derives significant revenue from the country. In its 2018 annual report, the company said it generated "meaningful revenue from a limited number of resellers representing advertisers

based in China."10 Pivotal Research Group estimated that number to be \$5 billion. Meet Social, a Shenzhen-based advertising reseller, said it would place between \$1 billion and \$2 billion in advertising on Facebook and Instagram in 2019.11

Who Is Successful in Chinese Social Media?

While the Great Firewall has kept foreign internet companies at bay, homegrown companies have been allowed to flourish. Some of the larger players include e-commerce retailers Alibaba ([BABA](#)) and JD.com ([JD](#)), search engine Baidu ([BIDU](#)), and micro-blogging service Sina Weibo ([WB](#)). Tencent QQ and WeChat are popular messaging apps similar to WhatsApp, while Tudou and Youku are China's version of YouTube.

Some Chinese internet companies have enjoyed considerable success abroad. Beijing-based ByteDance runs the short-form video app TikTok, estimated to have one billion users worldwide.12

How to Access Facebook in China

In addition to being banned in China, Facebook is also blocked in North Korea and Iran.13 The special administrative regions of Macau and Hong Kong have access under "One Country, Two Systems."

Despite the ban, there are a few ways to access Facebook and other blocked sites in China. Below are three options:

- Virtual private networks (VPN) are indispensable to travelers and foreigners living in China. Though VPNs are sometimes blocked and difficult to use, foreigners report they remain available.14 It is suggested you secure several VPN subscriptions before entering China, and to always assume traffic is being monitored.15
- A proxy website is another option, though these can also be monitored.
- Tor helps users to surf the internet anonymously. However, hackers in China have found ways to prevent users from accessing the network.16 17

The Future of Facebook in China

The Great Firewall prevents U.S. internet companies from establishing a foothold in China. [Mark Zuckerberg](#), the [chief executive officer](#) of Facebook, has made several high-profile visits to China, with little progress.18 The site has been blocked since 2009, though Facebook still manages to earn some revenue via advertising reseller networks. As long as strict controls remain in place, it appears Facebook and others will remain on the sidelines.