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## Google vs China: Does the internet giant really deserve our praise?

By [Will Heaven World](#) Last updated: January 13th, 2010

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A Chinese internet user riffs on Google's message (Image: <http://twitter.com/gonewater>)

Google – whose unofficial motto is “[don't be evil](#)” – is enjoying popularity in the Twittersverse today (see [here](#) and [here](#)). By threatening to pull out of China [if it cannot operate without censorship](#), the internet search giant has sent a powerful message to the Chinese government – as well as a reminder to the West that China's regime remains a repressive one.

As [Peter Foster comments](#), this is without doubt the ‘nuclear’ option. But does it really deserve our praise? Sarah Lacy on Techcrunch reckons this is [more about business than thwarting evil](#). Some might agree: when she met Google's former head of China, Kaifu Lee, last October, “he noted that one reason he left Google was that it was clear the company was never going to substantially increase its market share or beat Baidu.”

And it's true: Google was struggling in competition with Baidu, China's most popular search engine. Baidu.com holds over 60 per cent of China's search engine market while Google.cn – at its best - [has held just over half that](#). So perhaps Google is simply trying to spin a business decision. As Will Wilkinson, a Research Fellow at the [Cato Institute](#), bluntly [Tweeted last night](#), “Convince me that Google China move isn't [CSR](#) marketing for nerds.” He has a point: [even in 2005](#), Eric Schmidt cited “serious local competition” as a reason China topped his list of concerns.

The other question, of course, is whether this will improve China's record on human rights or freedom of information. Google's [official blog](#) makes it clear that, "We launched Google.cn in January 2006 in the belief that the benefits of increased access to information for people in China and a more open Internet outweighed our discomfort in agreeing to censor some results."

So what has changed? Well, there was the cyber attack in mid-December, [which Google reports](#) was "highly sophisticated" and targeted at "the Gmail accounts of Chinese human rights activists". But Google has been battling cyber-attacks and censorship since the very beginning of its China operation. It is understandable then, [as the Telegraph reports](#), that many Chinese bloggers view Google's possible exit as a tragedy for those who strive for freedom online. Even more of a tragedy, one presumes, for Google's Chinese employees.

*Google vs China: Read Peter Foster's blog [here](#), Telegraph commentary [here](#), and about the Chinese reaction this news [here](#). Malcolm Moore, the Telegraph's Shanghai Correspondent, is also [Tweeting about the topic](#).*

**Tags:** [Baidu.com](#), [china](#), [cyber-attacks](#), [Digital democracy](#), [Gmail](#), [Google](#), [Google.cn](#), [Human Rights](#), [Kaifu Lee](#), [online freedom](#)



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- Uh oh, it's Wee Willy Heaven suggesting appeasement is the way to go, again.

You appear to be suggesting that Google should have just dumbly accepted everything the Chinese government wants to do, William. Whatever the motivation, it's a good thing that someone is willing to show the Chinese government that their actions have consequences, and not every Western business is willing to bend over backwards to accommodate their every authoritarian whim.



Phil McG on Jan 13th, 2010 at 12:31 pm

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- Wow seriously, I have a question real simple: did Kaifu, the one who you claim you know, ever told you why he thinks google can't beat baidu? Your understandings about China can't be more wrong because apparently you know nothing about China. And even to the ultimate, assuming things are what you think they are, why would Google, a multi-billion world leading gaint, need to show the world that it is repressive? Does comedy effect really beats couple more billion cash?