



# Blocked on Weibo: What Gets Suppressed on China's Version of Twitter (And Why)

*Jason Q. Ng*

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Though often described with foreboding buzzwords such as "The Great Firewall" and the "censorship regime," Internet regulation in China is rarely either obvious or straightforward. This was the inspiration for China specialist Jason Q. Ng to write an innovative computer script that would make it possible to deduce just which terms are suppressed on China's most important social media site, Sina Weibo. The remarkable and groundbreaking result is *Blocked on Weibo*, which began as a highly praised blog and has been expanded here to list over 150 forbidden keywords, as well as offer possible explanations why the Chinese government would find these terms sensitive.

As Ng explains, Weibo (roughly the equivalent of Twitter), with over 500 million registered accounts, censors hundreds of words and phrases, ranging from fairly obvious terms, including "tank" (a reference to the "Tank Man" who stared down the Chinese army in Tiananmen Square) and the names of top government officials (if they can't be found online, they can't be criticized), to deeply obscure references, including "hairy bacon" (a coded insult referring to Mao's embalmed body).

With dozens of phrases that could get a Chinese Internet user invited to the local police station "for a cup of tea" (a euphemism for being detained by the authorities), *Blocked on Weibo* offers an invaluable guide to sensitive topics in modern-day China as well as a fascinating tour of recent Chinese history.

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