

Dalai Lama to tweet with Chinese web users

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Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama is shown at The Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya on January 10, 2010. The Dalai Lama will hold his first online chat with Chinese web users via Twitter on Friday, despite efforts by Beijing to silence him on the mainland.

The Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, will hold his first online chat with Chinese web users via Twitter on Friday, despite efforts by Beijing to silence him on the mainland.

The 1989 Nobel Peace Prize winner will hold an hour-long chat session to be broadcast on the Twitter account of Chinese writer Wang Lixiong, who has long been a critic of Beijing's policies in Tibet.

Wang said in a blog entry that the [Dalai Lama](#) -- reviled by Beijing as a separatist -- will respond to about 250 questions submitted by more than 1,100 [web users](#) on the mainland, where information about the monk is restricted.

Nearly 12,000 people selected the 250 questions by online voting done on a Google Moderator site, which was blocked in China on Thursday, according to Xiao Qiang, who heads the US-based China Digital Times.

The Dalai Lama joined Twitter, the popular micro-blogging site, earlier this year.

Although Twitter is blocked in China, Chinese users will be able to access the chat with the Dalai Lama, from 1200 GMT, as Twitter allows third-party applications and servers to freely use its data both inside and outside China.

This has made Twitter largely available in China, eliminating the need for the virtual proxy networks often used to circumvent the vast web of government [Internet censorship](#) sometimes dubbed the "Great Firewall of China", Xiao said.

"The Great Firewall has actually helped the Twitter community to grow in China in a way not seen around the world," he told AFP by telephone.

"This community has a particular political bond, which is anti-censorship. Many Twitter discussions are about Internet freedom and how to circumvent the so called Great Firewall in more sophisticated ways."

An estimated up to 150,000 Chinese have [Twitter](#) accounts, with as many as 100,000 of them physically living in the mainland, Xiao said.

[China](#) has called the Dalai Lama a "wolf in monk's clothing" and accused him of seeking to split the country, although he has repeatedly said he accepts Beijing's rule and is only seeking "meaningful autonomy" for [Tibet](#).

A decade of dialogue between representatives of the Tibetan leader and China's communist government has failed to reach any substantive progress.

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