

Facebook to launch China site with Baidu: report

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A woman walks past the logo of Baidu at its headquarters in Beijing in 2010. Facebook has signed an agreement with Chinese search engine giant Baidu to set up a new social networking site in China, a leading web portal reported Monday.

Facebook has signed an agreement with Chinese search engine giant Baidu to set up a new social networking site in China, a leading web portal reported Monday.

The new website will not be linked to Facebook's global service, which is currently blocked in China, the report on Sohu.com said, citing unnamed [Baidu](#) employees.

The agreement follows several meetings between Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and Baidu's chief executive Robin Li, it added, and comes amid reports the US social networking giant is eyeing a move into

mainland China.

Baidu spokesman Kaiser Kuo refused to comment when contacted by AFP, and the Sohu report was later taken off the website.

Facebook downplayed the report as rumor upon which it would not comment.

"We are currently studying and learning about China, as part of evaluating any possible approaches that could benefit our users, developers and advertisers," Facebook spokesperson Debbie Frost said in response to an AFP inquiry.

Facebook said in February it had opened a Hong Kong office, its third in Asia, while Zuckerberg visited China in December, prompting suggestions that Beijing may eventually welcome the California company.

During his China visit, Zuckerberg met with Charles Chao, chief executive of popular [web portal](#) Sina.com, as well as Li to discuss the world's biggest web market, a hugely lucrative landscape.

China has 450 million Internet users and rising, but it is also peppered with dominant domestic brands, technical hurdles and the threat of censorship.

Beijing has set up a vast online [censorship](#) system sometimes dubbed the "Great Firewall of [China](#)" that aggressively blocks sites and snuffs out [Internet content](#) on topics considered sensitive.

The system currently prevents most of the nation's web users from accessing Facebook.

The Sohu.com report said the launch date for the new website had not yet been decided.

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