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[U.S. Community Be Warned, China's Gonna Getcha!](#)

210 million and counting

Looking at China when it comes to the Internet is like looking into the little box where you keep the little things that you've carried through since childhood: a little tin soldier, the leg of an action figure, a button, a couple of the first love letters you ever received or those you never had the strength and courage to send. It's like looking back into your past, everything is gleaming with familiarity. China's online community is like the one mid to late '90s used to exhibit: enthusiastic and always looking for something new in the bohemian stage of Internet growth. What it has more, over the U.S. at that point, is the sheer numbers that now make it a contender for the world's largest online community. The growth since last year has been huge, of about 53 percent, 210 million compared to 137. The recently discovered number is just 5 million shy of hitting the top spot, currently held by the U.S. However, the penetration of Internet is a lot lower in the Asian country, for example about one out of three Chinese Internet users surf the web from cafés, while 93 percent of the American users have access to the WWW from home. John Horrigan, Pew's associate director, told the Associated Press that "China is approximately 15 years behind." The 15 years he mentioned are too little if we are to take into account the censorship that is still in place in China and the penalties applied for publishing content that the government does not agree with. Reporters Without Borders have been quoted by the AP as saying that there are 50 Chinese "cyberdissidents" in prison for that crime at the moment. "Users do a lot to shape the Internet and not only by directly posting content but (by) their behavior. [...] It tells other people what the demand is. As you get more Chinese, that increases demand for Internet content in Mandarin and other Chinese languages", Horrigan concluded.