Airbnb’s Chinese data policies reportedly cost it an executive

Airbnb’s chief trust officer Sean Joyce left the company after just six months in 2019 because the former FBI deputy director took issue with the company’s data sharing practices in China, according to a report in *The Wall Street Journal.*

For years, Airbnb has disclosed that it shares information such as phone numbers and email addresses with the Chinese government when a user books a rental in China. That happens whether the user is a Chinese citizen or a foreign visitor — a policy that’s required from all hospitality businesses operating in the country. Joyce, who Airbnb hired in May 2019 to protect the platform’s users, was concerned with Airbnb’s willingness to share data. Joyce also objected to the scope of the data shared, such as messages sent between guests and hosts, *The Wall Street Journal* reports. He feared it could allow the Chinese government to track foreign visitors and its own citizens.

Airbnb’s Chinese business is specifically mentioned in the S-1 filing the company made public Monday ahead of its planned initial public offering. “If [China’s rental] regulations or their interpretation changes in the future,” the prospectus reads, “we could be … forced to cease our operations in China.”

American tech companies have had to navigate tricky relationships with China for years. China currently blocks major companies like Facebook and Google for not complying with government requests for information. Others like Apple

turn a hefty profit in the country but are often criticized for making concessions to the country’s government.

China is one of the largest markets in the world, but the Chinese Communist Party’s preference for pervasive surveillance often has generated blowback from employees. Despite that, American companies have continued to provide the tools for the surveillance and censorship of China’s marginalized communities, such as Uighur Muslims, including the use of DNA databases to track their movements. These actions have directly lead to the persecution and detention of the group.

Airbnb did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The company is in what’s known as a “quiet period” because of its IPO filing, where there are restrictions on what company spokespeople and executives are allowed to say.

https://www.theverge.com/2020/11/20/21585500/airbnb-trust-officer-resignation-privacy-concerns-china-data-sharing