

Chinese communist party 'accessed Hong Kong protesters' TikTok data'

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A former executive at TikTok's parent company, ByteDance, has alleged that the Chinese Communist party accessed user data from the social video app belonging to Hong Kong protesters and civil rights activists. Yintao Yu, a former head of engineering at ByteDance's US operation, claimed in a legal filing that a committee of Communist party members accessed TikTok data that included the users' network information, Sim card identifications and IP addresses in a bid to identify the individuals and their locations. The claims, in a wrongful dismissal lawsuit brought by Yu in a California court and reported by the Wall Street Journal, also allege the party accessed TikTok users' communications, monitored Hong Kong users who uploaded protest-related content and that Beijing-based ByteDance maintained a "backdoor channel" for the party to access US user data. Yu alleges in the filing that members of a Communist party committee inside ByteDance had access to a "superuser" credential which was also called a "God credential" and allowed them to view all data collected by ByteDance. The filing adds that when Yu was at ByteDance, between August 2017 and November 2018, TikTok stored all users' direct messages, search histories and content viewed by users. ByteDance pulled the social video app from Hong Kong in 2020 amid concerns over a national security law that gave China enhanced powers in the city. TikTok's chief executive, Shou Zi Chew, appeared at a US congressional hearing in March and denied that the Chinese Communist party had accessed US user data. He said: "Let me state this unequivocally: ByteDance is not an agent of China or any other country." Yu's lawyer, Charles Jung, a partner at law firm Nassiri & Jung, told the WSJ that his client had come forward because he had concerns about Chew's testimony. A ByteDance spokesperson said the company denied Yu's claims. "We plan to vigorously oppose what we believe are baseless claims and allegations in this complaint. Mr Yu worked for ByteDance Inc. for less than a year and his employment ended in July 2018. During his brief time at the company, he worked on an app called Flipagram, which was discontinued years ago for business reasons," said the spokesperson. TikTok is under pressure from multiple governments over user data concerns. It has been banned on government-issued phones in the UK, US and Canada. The Biden administration has also demanded the platform's Chinese owners sell TikTok or face a complete ban