

# Business as usual for China’s NBA fans despite trade war

By Jason Cho, Danielle Goldfarb, and Emily Kuzan  
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*“Deep inside, we are all the same.”*  
- Nav Bhatia, outside the Oracle Arena, NBA finals Game 3

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver and Toronto Raptors “Superfan” Nav Bhatia are right: “basketball diplomacy” is thriving; Chinese people are watching the NBA finals, and have a view on who will win the most valuable player award.

We are in the midst of a major escalation in the China-U.S. trade and technology war and related freeze in China-Canada relations. At the same time, real-time RIWI data from 5,078 respondents in China show that they are deeply engaged in the NBA playoffs, which pit the Toronto Raptors against the Golden State Warriors. The NBA is a North American export to China that is not caught up in the political dispute (in contrast to Apple iPhone exports that are the subject of boycott rumours in China - see RIWI’s China Apple boycott data [here](#)). **Almost half of respondents representative of China’s online population have a view on which team will win the NBA Finals MVP award.**

## Share of Chinese engaged in NBA playoffs



Source: RIWI data, continuous China tracking, May 29-Jun 10, 2019. 5,078 Internet users.

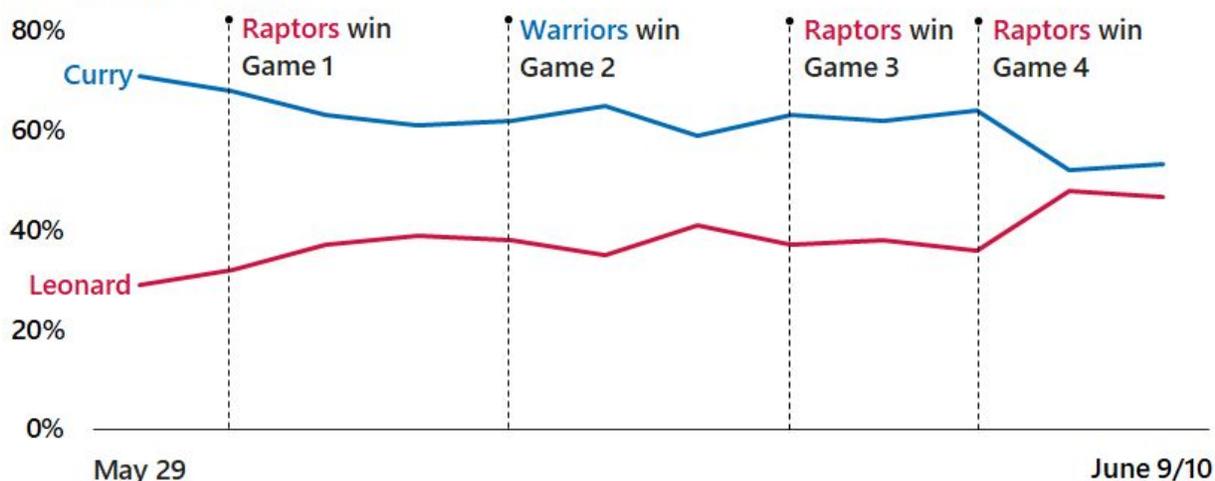
In the period from just before the NBA playoff finals began until 8pm on June 10 (Beijing time), RIWI asked 5,078 Chinese respondents representative of the online population which team they think will likely win the NBA Finals MVP Award. We asked them to choose between Stephen Curry (Golden State Warriors), Kawhi Leonard (Toronto Raptors), or select that they don't follow the NBA.

China is home to the world’s largest online population and has a massive NBA fanbase. In 2017, the NBA was the top followed league in China online, reaching 2.9 billion video views during the playoffs. Last year, regular season games had an average of four million viewers on

Chinese national television and three million on media platform Tencent, even though the games are broadcasted live in the mornings in China.

Forty-eight percent of respondents selected one of Leonard or Curry to win the MVP award rather than that they “don’t follow the NBA”. As the series unfolded, the share of respondents who had an opinion on the MVP selection grew. Currently there are over 800 million Internet users in China, so the RIWI data suggests that about 400 million Internet users are interested in the NBA.

## Who do you think is more likely to win the MVP of the 2019 NBA finals?



Source: RIWI data, continuous China tracking.

5,078 Internet users, of which 2,448 answered Curry or Leonard, the rest “don’t follow the NBA”.

RIWI data show that Steph Curry was the favourite at the beginning of the series, perhaps proxying interest in the Warriors. Betting odds posted by Caesars Palace in Las Vegas before the start of the finals were aligned with the Chinese online population’s initial prediction. At the start of the series, Vegas odds had Curry as the favourite to win MVP at -150 (bet \$150 to win \$100), and Leonard as second at +200 (bet \$100 to win \$200).

Despite the Raptors’ game 1 and 3 wins, Curry maintained a significant lead over the entire period. That is, until the Raptors game 4 win. After game 4, the gap narrowed and respondents gave Leonard and Curry almost equal chances of winning the MVP award. Betting odds have now shifted and, as of June 9, place Leonard as the favourite to win at -127 (bet \$127 to win \$100), dropping Curry to second at +106 (bet \$100 to win \$106).

As the China disputes with the U.S. and Canada unfold, the NBA is monitoring developments in China but Commissioner Adam Silver has said he is not concerned about the current political situation and believes in the power of sports in bringing people together. Silver stated, “we can

use basketball maybe in the way ping-pong was used in the days of Richard Nixon, that there could be something called basketball diplomacy.”<sup>1</sup> So far, RIWI data show it is business as usual for the massive numbers of NBA fans in China.

**To learn more about RIWI’s NBA data, or real-time, customized political, social and economic trackers in China or in any country, please contact:**

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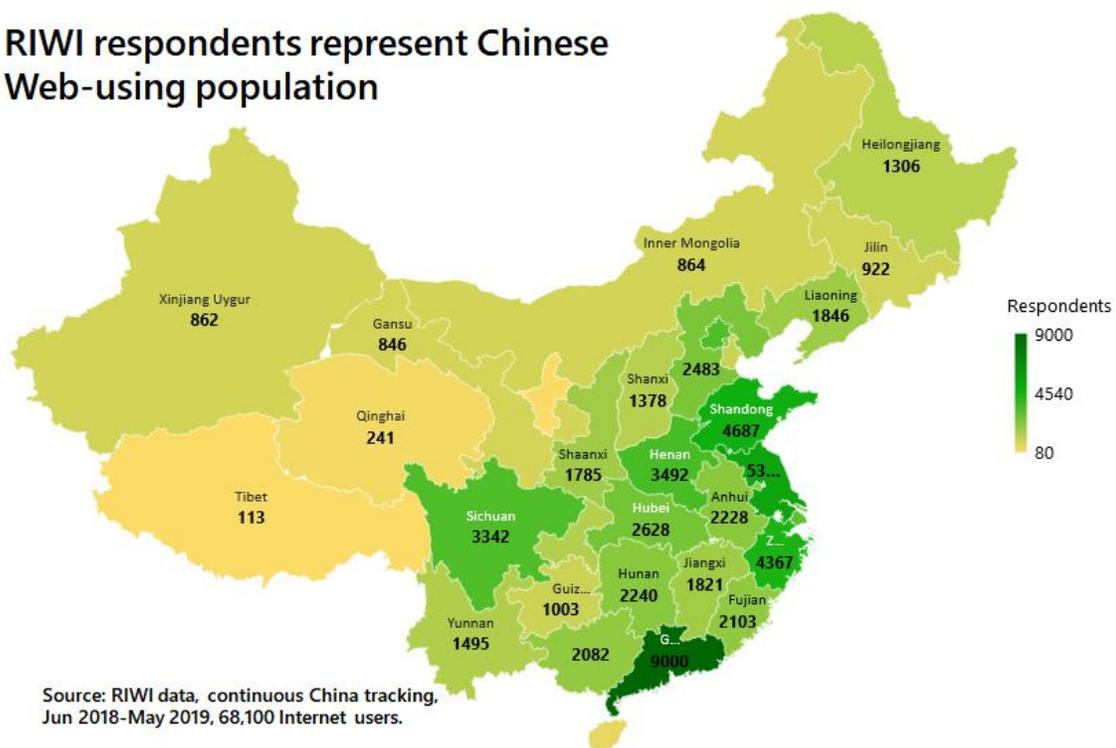
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nba.com/article/2019/05/30/silver-addresses-global-topics-ahead-international-finals>

## RIWI reaches a broader set of voices

RIWI is a global trend-tracking and prediction company that is a leader in data quality, privacy, and security (see [here](#) for more information). RIWI technology is used extensively and under long-term agreements by the Bank of America, the U.S. State Department and by other G7 government agencies, the World Bank, UN agencies, and academics at top Universities such as Harvard and Oxford. RIWI won the “Rising Star” award for data that yields an investment edge at the 2019 Battle of the Quants in New York City, based on its real-time data feeds in China.

Better, more reliable data depends on hearing from a broad array of random voices. RIWI technology reaches the broadest possible set of respondents, drawing in populations otherwise not included in data collection. In China and globally, RIWI captures views of respondents representative of the Web-using population. RIWI’s randomized respondent-engagement approach gathers broad-based sentiment from across all of China, including from urban and rural regions, and from across age groups. RIWI respondents remain anonymous and RIWI does not collect, process, store or transfer personally identifiable data, allowing respondents to provide their views freely and securely, reducing social desirability bias. RIWI respondents are not incentivized to participate in RIWI surveys in any way.

### RIWI respondents represent Chinese Web-using population



## When was the last time you answered survey questions?

Past month | **Over a month ago** | Never



Source: RIWI data, continuous China tracking, Mar 5-Jun 5, 2019, 20,180 Internet users.

For more on RIWI's award-winning technology and its applications, see: <https://riwi.com>.