



NEW ZEALAND
FOREIGN AFFAIRS & TRADE
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China's Gaming Market: Scale, Growth and a Distinct Regulatory Environment

MARKET INTELLIGENCE REPORT

Report

China has one of the largest gaming markets globally and continues to grow. It is also one of the most tightly regulated, underpinned by stringent government oversight.

The National Press and Publication Administration (NPPA) is China's regulatory authority responsible for licensing and approving domestic and international games.

This report provides a step-by-step outline of the process to seek approval for mobile games in China.

1. Find a Chinese operator and publisher based in mainland China

China generally requires any game intended for official release or monetisation in mainland China - whether mobile, PC, or console - to obtain a Game Publishing ISBN approval (ISBN), commonly known as a “game license”.

A foreign gaming company cannot apply for an ISBN and therefore must partner with a Chinese operator based in mainland China. A Chinese game operator oversees the day-to-day management of the game, including revenue generation and ongoing regulatory compliance. The operator will also apply for a Software Copyright Certificate. To facilitate this, the foreign gaming company must provide a portion of the source code—which part of the source code is at the gaming company's own discretion—to the operator.

A Chinese game operator must:

- Hold a commercial Internet Content Provider (ICP) License (also known as a B25 License)
- Hold an ICP Filing (mandatory registration with the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology)
- Apply for a Mobile App Filing (required to publish or update games on any Chinese platform)
- A Chinese publisher is also required, and is generally a state-owned organisation in China. The publisher verifies the operator's ICP licence and assesses the game for compliance with local regulations.

In practice, a Chinese **operator** has relationships with approved publishers and because there is ongoing communication between an operator and a publisher while collating all the documents required to apply for approval, a Chinese operator can work directly with a publisher on behalf of the foreign gaming company. Having both a Chinese operator and publisher is key to starting the process to apply for approval for a mobile game to enter China.

A Chinese game **publisher** must hold a Web Publishing Service License.

It is not possible to partner with an operator and publisher in Hong Kong and Macao to apply for an ISBN. Foreign companies running an office or subsidiary in China also cannot apply for an ISBN.

2. Register the Software Copyright Certificate

For imported games, the Software Copyright Certificate between the foreign gaming company (as the copyright holder) and the Chinese operator must be registered with the National Copyright Administration. The Chinese operator can advise how a foreign gaming company can complete these procedures.

3. Ensure the content complies with NPPA's regulations

An experienced Chinese operator and publisher should advise if the game content aligns with NPPA's guidance. Certain content is prohibited such as drugs, gambling (including Mahjong and poker), organized crime, pornographic or sexual content. Furthermore, all game content must be compatible with Chinese laws and regulations, including restrictions on politically sensitive material, social values, and public morality.

Chinese authorities consider the following in games during the content review process:

- Cultural messaging
- Whether character designs, dialogue, and artistic style align with mainstream values
- Whether there are any overseas political metaphors or sensitive symbols.

A Chinese publisher should be able to conduct a thorough content compliance check before submitting the game for approval and, if necessary, engage professional institutions with expertise in Chinese policies for assistance.

Mandatory Submission Materials

Chinese publishers must submit a full package to NPPA, including:

- Full game build
- Complete script, text, video, and assets
- Monetisation design
- Real name authentication integration
- Anti addiction mechanisms

Required Regulatory Features

China has a number of requirements related to user protection. Some of these are:

Data localisation (if the game collects personal information, such as a phone number or email address from a user, the data must be stored on a server physically located in mainland China). A game operator can advise on storage options.

- Real name verification
- Age based restrictions and minor protection mechanisms (e.g. gaming time limits, spending limits)
- Healthy Gaming Advice splash screen text
- Privacy policy and Terms of Service conforming to Ministry of Industry and Information Technology rules
- Display of NPPA license number at startup

Age rating

The age rating for a mobile game is requested by the operator and publisher during the ISBN application and assigned by the NPPA as part of the content review before the ISBN is issued.

China has its own formal age rating system which operates like the New Zealand classification system, the Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) used in Europe or the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) used mainly in North America. The Chinese operator applies to the China Audio-Video and Digital Publishing Association for a game rating to be assigned one of the three options:

- 8+
 - 12+
 - 16+
-

4. Apply for a Game Publishing ISBN

The Game Publishing ISBN is the official approval number required to legally publish and monetise a game. It serves as the game's unique identifier in the Chinese market - akin to a digital identity card.

Localisation of the game is an integral part of the ISBN application. Games must be fully localised using simplified Chinese, and foreign-language text is typically required to be translated or minimised. This includes text found on road signs, building names or signboards - all of which needs to be translated into simplified Chinese.

The ISBN application requires extensive documentation, including copies of licenses, complete game content exports, and comprehensive visual demonstrations. Once the application is ready, the Chinese publisher submits the ISBN application to the provincial-level publishing authority where the publisher is located. Following review (and if approved at the provincial level), the provincial authority will submit the application to the NPPA for final approval.

If the game is approved by the NPPA, the NPPA issues the ISBN, which legally authorises the game to operate and generate revenue in China.

5. Distribution through local platforms

Once a game obtains an ISBN, the Chinese partner can arrange the game's distribution through local platforms. Games must be distributed through China-specific platforms and app stores; global distribution channels are generally not sufficient to reach mainland users, for example, Google Play is not available in mainland China. Apple's App Store however, is available but requires publishers to provide an ISBN number before a product can be made available for Chinese users. Other app stores include Huawei AppGallery and Tencent Appstore.

6. Timeframes for NPPA Approval

The NPPA does not publish approval timeframes, and the approval process can take from a few months to up to a year or longer. Approval trends show approval batches are issued monthly.

What to do if you encounter an issue during the approval process

China's regulatory framework does not provide formal appeal procedures or timeframes. Not receiving a response is common. NPPA's monthly public approval list is the main mechanism to see which games have been approved. Absence from lists usually indicates the application is still in the queue to be processed.

The official monthly approval lists can be found on the NPPA's website using the following steps:

- Click the following link: [NPPA – Game Approval Results](#) (In-browser translation is recommended).
- If unavailable, go to:
首页 (Home) → 办事服务 (Services) → 结果公示 (Public Results) → 游戏审批结果 (Game Approval Results)
- You'll then see:
 - 国产网络游戏审批信息 (domestic games)
 - 进口网络游戏审批信息 (imported games)
 - 审批变更信息 (changes to approvals)
- You will find monthly lists which include the:
 - Game title
 - Publisher (出版单位)
 - Operator (运营单位)
 - ISBN approval number
 - Approval date

The list of all games approved from January – April 2026 is in the table below.

No	Name	Application Category	Publishing Unit	Operating Unit	Approval Document No.	Publication No. (ISBN)	Approval Date
1	Big Helmet Heroes	Client	Jiangsu Phoenix Digital Media Co., Ltd.	Shanghai Gogqu Information Technology Service Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 977	978-7-498-16823-8	2026-04-28
2	Richman: Global Riches	Mobile	Sichuan Digital Publishing Media Co., Ltd.	Chengdu Upstream Digital Entertainment Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 978	978-7-498-16824-5	2026-04-28
3	Arc Hunter	Client	Sichuan Digital Publishing Media Co., Ltd.	Chengdu Jiaxiang Jiyue Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 979	978-7-498-16825-2	2026-04-28
4	Brotato	Mobile, Client	Shanghai Science and Technology Literature Press Co., Ltd.	Shanghai Yoika Network Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 980	978-7-498-16826-9	2026-04-28
5	Siege	Mobile	Jiangsu Phoenix Electronic Audiovisual Publishing House Co., Ltd.	Nanjing Shiwanhu Interactive Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 981	978-7-498-16827-6	2026-04-28
6	Ragnarok: Battle of the Gods	Mobile, Client	Jiangsu Phoenix Digital Media Co., Ltd.	Shanghai Rexue Network Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 982	978-7-498-16828-3	2026-04-28

No	Name	Application Category	Publishing Unit	Operating Unit	Approval Document No.	Publication No. (ISBN)	Approval Date
7	Xuan-Yuan Sword: Ancient Artifacts	Mobile	Shanghai Kingnet Network Technology Co., Ltd.	Shanghai Kingnet Information Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 983	978-7-498-16829-0	2026-04-28
8	Brawl Knights	Mobile, Client	Jiangsu Phoenix Digital Media Co., Ltd.	Nanjing Chenqu Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 745	978-7-498-16674-6	2026-03-24
9	Aftermath Company	Mobile	Guangzhou Gude Network Technology Co., Ltd.	Shanghai Qingyuyou Information Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 744	978-7-498-16673-9	2026-03-24
10	Shaiya: Conflict	Mobile	Jiangsu Phoenix Electronic Audiovisual Publishing House Co., Ltd.	Nanjing Chenqu Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 745	978-7-498-16674-6	2026-03-24
11	Gem War	Mobile	Jiangsu Phoenix Digital Media Co., Ltd.	Shenzhen Zhongshun Heying Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 524	978-7-498-16535-0	2026-02-26
12	Foundation: Galactic Crossroads	Mobile	Tianjin Electronic Publishing House Co., Ltd.	Beijing Energy Box Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 525	978-7-498-16536-7	2026-02-26
13	Wonderland Online: New World	Mobile, Client	Beijing Longtu Kuangjie Technology Co., Ltd.	Beijing Daqian Huyu Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 526	978-7-498-16537-4	2026-02-26
14	Shaiya: Light and Dark	Mobile, Client	Shaanxi Sanqin Publishing House Co., Ltd.	Xi'an Chuangtian Network Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 527	978-7-498-16538-1	2026-02-26
15	Xiao Huan Xiong Bai Jiang Zhuan 2	Mobile	Jiangsu Phoenix Electronic Audiovisual Publishing House Co., Ltd.	Jiangsu Sanjiu Mutual Entertainment Network Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 528	978-7-498-16539-8	2026-02-26
16	Legend of Sintburg	Mobile	Beijing United Publishing Co., Ltd.	Beijing Longwei Interactive Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 529	978-7-498-16540-4	2026-02-26
17	Rainbow Six: Offensive	Client	East China Normal University Electronic Audiovisual Publishing House Co., Ltd.	Shanghai Nayuan Information Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 269	978-7-498-16385-1	2026-01-23

No	Name	Application Category	Publishing Unit	Operating Unit	Approval Document No.	Publication No. (ISBN)	Approval Date
18	Rainbow Island: Alice's Realm	Mobile	Sichuan Digital Publishing Media Co., Ltd.	Shanghai Shuxin Network Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 270	978-7-498-16386-8	2026-01-23
19	Angry Birds: Classic Comeback	Mobile	Chengdu Kingsoft Digital Entertainment Technology Co., Ltd.	Chengdu Kingsoft Shiyou Zhuoli Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 271	978-7-498-16387-5	2026-01-23
20	Angry Birds: Dream Blast	Mobile	Chengdu Kingsoft Digital Entertainment Technology Co., Ltd.	Chengdu Kingsoft Shiyou Zhuoli Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 272	978-7-498-16388-2	2026-01-23
21	Secret Treasure Hunt	Mobile	Shanghai Science and Technology Literature Press Co., Ltd.	Shanghai Dongrui Information Technology Co., Ltd.	Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. 273	978-7-498-16389-9	2026-01-23

Notes:

- **Guoxin Chushen [2026] No. XXX** is the official approval document number issued by the National Press and Publication Administration (NPPA).
 - **ISBN** is the unique Game Publication Number required for legal game operation in China.
 - **Application Categories:** "Mobile" refers to mobile games; "Client" refers to PC client games.
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