

Is China Banning All Unapproved Games from Live Streaming?

[CHINA REGULATION WATCH](#)¹

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1. Introduction

On April 12, 2022, the National Radio and Television Administration (国家广播电视总局) (the “[NRTA](#)”) and the Propaganda Department of the Central Committee (中央宣传部) (the “[CPD](#)”) issued the Notice on Strengthening the Administration of Game Live Streaming on Online Audio-Visual Platforms (关于加强网络视听节目平台游戏直播管理的通知) (the “[Game Live Streaming Notice](#)”), pursuant to which online audio-visual content, such as online movies and television, online entertainment shows, live streams, and other short videos, are prohibited from displaying games that are not approved by a relevant authority. Similarly, the Game Live Streaming Notice also prohibits various platforms from attracting user visits for unapproved or illegal gaming content.

2. 2016 MOC Online Performance Rules

This is not the first time that China banned the broadcasting of games which lack the requisite game approvals. On December 2, 2016, the Ministry of Culture (文化部) (the “[MOC](#)”) issued the Online Performance Business Operation Management Rules (网络表演经营活动管理办法) (the “[MOC Online Performance Rules](#)”), pursuant to which online games lacking approval by the MOC were banned from being displayed in online content (including game live streaming).² Although as of March 2018 the MOC is no longer the regulator conducting game censorship reviews for game approvals, the MOC Online Performance Rules are still in effect.

In light of China’s game broadcasting rules, Bilibili, a popular youth-oriented video streaming and sharing giant in China, issued a new announcement on January 10, 2022 providing a list of games that are prohibited from being broadcast on their platform.³ Bilibili issues and updates such lists on a yearly basis, beginning in 2017. The 2022 announcement

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² See Section 6(6) of the MOC Online Performance Rules. Please find more information in our China Regulation Watch: [China Issues Live Online Streaming Rules](#).

³ See “[Bilibili Announces the Latest Game Ban List \(B站公布最新游戏禁播名单\)](#)” posted by Guancha Syndicate on January 10, 2022.

lists out about 60 prohibited games, and notably includes H1Z1, Grand Theft Auto 5, Tomb Raider 9, Dead by Daylight, and Resident Evil Village. According to Bilibili's announcement, these prohibited titles track the list provided by the MOC. Most of the games on this internal list contain elements of violence and horror, and some are rated for adult audiences only, touting a rating of PEGI-18 under the Pan-European Game Information (PEGI) content rating system, or a rating of M under the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) content rating system. Although for a long time, regulators in China did not strictly prohibit games without requisite approvals from all online media, these regulators maintained an internal list of games deemed to have bad influence on the public (especially on minors) when displayed publicly online.

3. Implementation of Game Live Streaming Notice

The Game Live Streaming Notice specifically requires the local offices of the National Press and Publication Administration (国家新闻出版署) (the “NPPA”) and the NRTA in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, and Hubei to work with relevant platforms and game companies within their respective administrative regions to establish detailed measures to implement the requirements of the notice, to enhance supervision of online live streams, and to strengthen protections for minors online. However, based on an April 19, 2022 review of a few major game live streaming platforms in China such as Huya, Douyu, and Bilibili, many popular-but-unapproved games such as Elden Ring, Dread Hunger, Sekiro, and Fall Guys are still actively broadcasted by many live streamers. These platforms also tag such live streams with relevant game tags for easy searchability. It is unclear if this implies the platforms will still follow their previous practice of keeping an internal game ban list, or if the relevant authorities and platforms have not yet established a means of implementing the notice. To date, the live streaming of unapproved games appears unaffected.

4. Game Marketing

If regulators finally decide to strictly implement the Game Live Streaming Notice, and ban all games without the requisite game approvals from being presented on all online audio-visual platforms (including live streaming and short videos), the most affected businesses in the game industry will likely be game marketing services and developers. Many developers of unapproved games promote their games in the China market through celebrities that play their games over live stream or record short videos of their gameplay to post on Bilibili and Douyin, especially popular console games and PC games launched on Steam.