

# Administrative Provisions for Account Names of Internet Users Released

## [CHINA REGULATION WATCH](#)<sup>1</sup>

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On February 4, 2015, the Cyberspace Administration of China (国家互联网信息办公室) issued the “Administrative Provisions on Account Names of Internet Users (互联网用户账号名称管理规定)”<sup>2</sup> to standardize services for, and usage of, account names, portraits and profiles. The new provisions will become effective on March 1, 2015.

Under these new provisions, account names of internet users refers to the account names of entities or individuals that are registered or used for services, and allow the users to post comments or articles on the internet, such as blogs, microblogs, BBS, etc. The new provisions contain the following key points:

- (i) The Cyberspace Administration of China shall supervise and manage the registration and usage of account names.
- (ii) The provisions specify the internet service providers’ management responsibilities such as examining and verifying account names, and not registering account names that include “illegal and offensive” information.
- (iii) The provisions indicate that the principle of account registration is “real name backstage, voluntary display front stage (后台实名，前台自愿)”, which means that internet users must register their real names and identifying information with the service provider platforms, but they are not required to use their real name as the screen name visible to other users.

These provisions are not the first regulations that attempt to implement a real name registration regime for internet services in China. For example, in July 2011 in the online game industry, eight government departments jointly released a notice requiring online game companies to incorporate a real-name verification system into their games.<sup>3</sup> In addition, in December 2011, the

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<sup>2</sup> See [State Council](#) website for reference.

<sup>3</sup> See “[China Initiates Work on Online Gaming Real-Name System](#)”, posted at [marbridgeconsulting.com](http://marbridgeconsulting.com) on July 30, 2011. See also the Notice Regarding China Initiates Work for the Online Game Real-Name System (关于启动网络游戏防沉迷实名认证工作的通知), issued by eight government departments including SAPPRFT and the Ministry of Public Security on July 1, 2011.



Beijing city government issued rules requiring full implementation of a real-name registration system for micro blog services based in Beijing, which includes Sina Weibo – a Twitter style service that is extremely popular and politically controversial in China.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, in December 2012, the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (全国人民代表大会常务委员会) issued a decision, which prescribed that the internet service providers allowing users to post comments or articles on the internet, such as blogs, microblogs, instant messaging, BBS, etc., shall require users to provide their real identity information when entering into an agreement with the internet service provider or when confirming the provided internet services.<sup>5</sup>

The real-name registration requirements set forth in these rules and regulations have not, however, been fully implemented because effective implementation is constrained by costs associated with the verification of real-name registration information provided by users. The Ministry of Public Security (公安部) has outsourced real-name verification services to a state-owned enterprise under its control, the National Citizen Identity Information Center (全国公民身份证号码查询服务中心) (“NCIIC”). However, considering the tremendous amount of internet accounts and technical limitations of NCIIC, it has not yet been feasible or practical for the internet service providers to fully comply with the real-name registration requirements. As a result, it has been fairly easy for tech savvy users to avoid using their real name in registering with internet service providers.

The new provisions reiterate the prior regulations and specify the responsibilities of government authorities, internet providers and internet users. It is not yet clear, however, whether this latest set of real-name registration regulations will be implemented with more success than past attempts. Successful implementation of a real-name registration regime for China’s internet would most likely have a material chilling effect upon the often lively discussions that take place on China’s internet, including the various microblogging platforms such as Sina’s Weibo and Tencent’s Weixin.

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<sup>4</sup> See Article 9 of Several Rules on the Administration of Weibo Development (北京市微博客发展管理若干规定) issued by the Beijing city government on December 16, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> See Article 6 of Decision of the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress on Strengthening Network information Protection (全国人民代表大会常务委员会关于加强网络信息保护的決定) issued on December 28, 2012.